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#48

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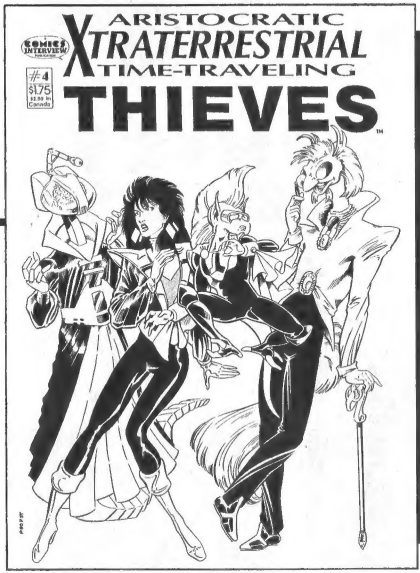

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THE BEAST THAT
LEAPS, SLEEPS & PEEPS
made in the shade

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REVENGE OF THE WRITERS

This issue, the scripters strike back — or so it seems. Because comics is obviously a visual medium, there is a tendency on the part of many to minimize or dismiss completely the contribution of the writer in favor of the artists. It is, I'm sure, no secret where my own sympathies lie.

For years, whenever asked what exactly it was that I did in the way of work, my reply was always met with either astonishment or utter incomprehension, "I didn't know anyone actually *wrote* comics!" or, better yet, "So, you *draw* comics!" The parallel would be an architect being greeted with outright amazement at a cocktail party when describing his contribution to a building. Can you imagine? "I didn't know anyone actually *designed* buildings!" or "So, you *construct* buildings!"

One of the many contributions made by Mr. Marvel — **Stan Lee** — was the practice, now taken for granted, of putting credits on comics . . . that all-important first step toward having the field taken seriously as an artform. More recently, the role of winning respect for comics writers has been well-played by **Alan Moore**, whose extraordinary work has won widespread acclaim and recognition. I am happy to say that we interviewed him first, way back in COMICS INTERVIEW #12, on his way to conquering American comics. Now, we have his "farewell to comics" interview, too.

And, for the WATCHMEN watchers among you, we talk to two writers who have made contributions of their own to the mythos in the form of role-playing games. Add to that a rap with writer/editor **R.A. Jones**, and, for once, the writers are more than equitably represented.

As for me, I've gone from writing to publishing, so now when asked what I do, you'll be happy to know people's reactions show a much higher comprehension as regards my contribution.

"So, you *print* comics!"

DAVID

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL:
UP FRONT
a rap with *dak*
5

WRITER:
ALAN MOORE
reveals what he really thinks of superheroes plus: *watchmen* — the movie!?
7

WRITER:
DANIEL GREENBERG
a word with the wizard of the first mayfair games *watchmen* module
21

WRITER:
RAY WINNINGER
talks of alcoholism, v.d., prostitutes and other precursors of the second *watchmen* game module
31

WRITER/EDITOR:
R.A. JONES
tells james vance what working under the fantagraphics whip is really like!
40

MARKETER:
HANK ROSE
ever wonder about the story behind all those stickers, pens, buttons & t-shirts?
55

LETTERS:
THE LAST WORD
in which the question of how to find copies of *comics interview* is answered
63

Comics Interview

So far, there are only four titles from David Anthony Kraft's publishing company, but I like all of them.

• *MICRA* is an acronym for *Mind Controlled Remote Automaton*. It is also one heck of a good comic book by Lamar Waldron and Ted Boonthanakit. This is a 12-issue limited series about a crippled woman who can project her consciousness into an automaton (see the title).

That is a much-too-simplified summation of a rich, complex SF novel in comic-book form. Ted's art has been compared to many different American artists (none of whose work Ted has seen; he was born in Thailand and grew up in Africa) and is remarkably clear and exciting.

Grade: A.

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MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON

• *Aristocratic X-traterrestrial Time-Traveling Thieves* (*X-Thieves* for short) has had two first issues, which is annoying to indexers and compilers of price guides, but the bright, sprightly scripts by Henry Vogel and the appropriately humorous art of Mark Propst make up for that. One of the main features of this comic book is that, like the *Mad* comic books, the panels are filled with gags, such as the crisis hotline which warns: "New universe forming — disaster imminent!"

The Southern Knights make a guest appearance in the second first issue, in which the X-Thieves steal the formula for original Coca-Cola. This is one of the best of the funny comic books (and one of the handful that really *is* funny).

Grade: A.

X-THIEVES™

• I haven't seen the last couple of issues of *Southern Knights* yet but, unless the series has gone radically downhill since #16, this is still one of the best and most original of all the supergroups. Grade: A.

• While *Comics Interview* is not a comic book, I think I can squeeze in a recommendation. This excellent publication gives a well-rounded view of the industry, with interviews with writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and others.

Naturally, your interest in an issue will depend on who is being interviewed, but there have been 40 issues of *Comics Interview* and no totally dull ones — not even the *G.I. Joe* issue. Grade: A.

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS™

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— Don Thompson
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"Fox have optioned a WATCHMEN film."

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ALAN MOORE

I wish I could have taken up more of Alan Moore's time for this interview, since we covered only a small fraction of the topics I would have gone into with him, but if he had had more time to spare then I probably would not have gotten to speak with him at all. Dave Kraft wanted to do an issue centered on WATCHMEN. DAK called Alan, who agreed to sit for an interview, but as his time is limited it was agreed that the interview would take place over the phone. However, apparently in England the apparatus for recording a telephone conversation by jacking directly into a phone line is against the law — so the interview had to be done by someone on this side of the Atlantic. DAK couldn't do the interview, himself, since having read the first issue he decided to wait until he had the complete WATCHMEN series to read in one sitting (but he has to read this before he can publish it, hurm!).

I got a call from Dave. Would I do the interview? My mouth dry, I was unable to speak. I thought, "Me? Interview Alan Moore, the #1 writer in the comics field? The talent responsible for all those memorable issues of SWAMP THING, MIRACLEMAN, WATCHMEN and so on...ME?!?" What if I blew it? I could imagine the scene, Alan Moore screaming vehemently over something I'd said while I, in a bout of pseudo-aphasia, cowered in mute ineptitude.

Fortunately, that didn't happen. Alan made it very easy for me, and I thank him for that. We're touching bases here. I'm glad I got to speak with Alan, however briefly. I'm glad Dave Kraft is paying the phone bill. I'm glad no one in England thought of simply having Alan record his answers and forwarding us the tape...

DARREL BOATZ: *As we're speaking, the eleventh issue of WATCHMEN is out — I haven't yet seen it myself — but by the time this interview appears the whole series will be out. It should be all over the shouting. I imagine you've pretty much completed all of your work by now?*

ALAN MOORE: Just about. I finished WATCHMEN a little over a week or so ago, **Dave Gibbons** has finished the artwork and, yeah, the last issue is very satisfactory. We're going to have a DALLAS ending, you know; one of the characters wakes up and finds the Comedian in the shower and realizes that it was all a dream. *(Laughter.)* I finished SWAMP THING at roughly the same time, my last issue of that, which was another great relief — so my comic work, at least for the moment, is completed. I

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"I've got silly ass fanboy nostalgia."

WATCHMEN

just finished doing a four-page Godzilla pinup, which I had a lot of fun with. I don't think it's going to get me the best artist award next year — but it was, you know, a brief amusement on an otherwise jaded palate.

Currently I'm just finishing off the rewrite on FASHION BEAST, which is the film I'm doing with **Malcolm McLaren.** And after that I'm going to take a couple of months off and basically not have a single creative thought in my head for that entire period. I'm just going to sit and watch data on television and vegetate and hang around with my family and sort of human, mundane stuff like that.

DARREL: *Take some time off after four years of gruelling work?*

ALAN: About eight years, actually. It's been eight years of working weekends and working approximately a ten- sometimes eleven-hour day, and I haven't had a holiday in that time, so this two months is going to be something quite spectacular.

DARREL: *You still have MIRACLEMAN in the works, don't you?*

ALAN: Yeah. There are still six episodes in Book Three of MIRACLEMAN: I've just finished writing the third one. I had some problems with getting into the third book of MIRACLEMAN, mainly because I had made a lot of those concepts redundant in the work that I've done since then, because there had been such a long gap in MIRACLEMAN in certain directions, so I had to try and find a way in which I could make the material in MIRACLEMAN interesting to me again.

DARREL: *Plus I imagine it's also difficult picking something up after you've had quite a bit time off from it?*

ALAN: Sure. I finished off Book Two for Eclipse, which although I hadn't been turning out the scripts at a *furious* rate by any means, it did at least sort of get me back into the action sort of slowly, so that by the time Book Three rolled around I was at least feeling more comfortable with the character again. Luckily, with the arrival of **John Totleben** on Book Three, and with an idea which MIRACLEMAN Book Two artist **Chuck Beckum** provided the original start for, we've managed to turn MIRACLEMAN around. I'm very, very pleased with it.

I've only seen the artwork for the first episode, but John is doing some remarkable work. Think back and remember how excited you probably were when you first heard that **Virgil Finlay** had drawn issues of MYSTERY IN SPACE — if you were anything like me you were excited, because you could imagine all of these elegantly stippled alien landscapes unfolding — and then you, when you actually saw the comic, it was something of a disappointment, because it hadn't lived up to the *image* in your head of **Virgil Finlay** doing sort of science-fiction comics.

So when I saw John's artwork for this first episode of Book Three of MIRACLEMAN, it was a revelation. That was the way I had expected **Virgil Finlay**'s comics work to look. It's wonderful. And from what John tells me, he's sort of feeling more comfortable with the third book as it goes along. I think it's some of my best writing for a long while, and it's certainly as *radical* a take on the superhero as you are liable to get from me for some considerable while, so I think it should be okay.

DARREL: *A lot of people say that, you know, superheroes present problems for them. Do you have problems with superheroes?*

ALAN: Well, superheroes have never presented any real problems for me. I mean, obviously, I've got a deep love and regard for superheroes as a genre — otherwise, well, I wouldn't have handled the SUPERMAN stories that I did in the way that I did. I've got a lot of this silly ass sort of fanboy nostalgia in me, you know, and a great *love* for the superhero genre.

"I've become sick of superheroes."

I don't particularly find any trouble in writing it, because *if* you stretch your mind a little bit there is generally some new way that you can approach the material. I mean, I thought I'd exhausted everything with WATCHMEN; as it turns out with this third book of MIRACLEMAN, there's still another sort of theme, a promising one, there to be mined.

I think that, for me, the problem is not that I find a difficulty with superheroes, but that, at least for the time being, I have become sick of them. I've gone right to the extremes of the superhero myths, and there comes a point where you just think why — you know, yeah, sure, I'm taking the superhero to new extremes, but why the superhero? — and, really, there's no adequate answer for that. Partly, the answer is that the superhero is fun. But if the superhero is allowed to sort of dominate my work to the exclusion of all of the other genres which I am equally interested in, then it becomes less than fun. So I think at least for the time being I'm going to be trying to steer away from superhero work. I do enjoy it, but there are other hoes that I want to row.

DARREL: *Maybe you'll come out with ALAN MOORE'S PLEATH COMICS?*

ALAN: That's a possibility. There's an awful *lot* of genres. I've been immersing myself in my spare time — what little I've had — in the old EC collections, the **Russ Cochran** reprints and look at their shock and crime suspense stories; at their humor comics; TWO-FISTED TALES, their war comics; PIRACY, which I've got a couple issues of. It makes you just realize what a *wealth* of different genres used to exist in the comic-book field, that have been whittled down over the passing decades, until we have this currently quite *stunted* state of affairs where the superheroes predominate. Where even the most talented creators seem to be more or less, well, condemned to just coming up with increasingly more bizarre and novel twists upon the basic sort of superhero pun — which is jolly enjoyable and rewarding in itself, but I think I'd like to play the field a little bit more and just *explore* some of the genres that have been neglected for so long. Romance comics, I think there's a place for them in the '80's, but perhaps they wouldn't be recognizable as anything like the romance comics that have come before. There's a place for all sorts of genres to be reexplored and reinvented, and I think that that is perhaps more likely to be the area into which my work takes me over the next couple of years, than the superhero genre.

DARREL: *Well, let's get into WATCHMEN a little bit. The basic premise of the series — if superheroes actually existed, they would have an effect on the course of world events — its amazes me that no one has done that before.*

I COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF A SHE HAD LIED TO ME!
AWWWW, DON'T WHEN SO YOU HAVE TO GO THAT INTERVIEW THIS EVENING IS IT SOON?
PHIPP!
GOOD HEY, YOU KNOW IT'S LIKE LICKING A FLASH LIGHT BATTERY IT'S ALL SORT OF...
UUHH...
NO, WE HAVE PLENTY OF TIME
AAAAAA
OH GOD! OH GOD! I'M GONNA DROWN! I'M GONNA BITE IT!
LAUGH! I DON'T BE UPSET
THOUGHT YOU'D GO TO THE TO PLEASE YOU...
TOM, BE ONE TO PLEASE AGAIN?
Y-I KNOW, DARLING, BUT I'VE BEEN REACTED
YOU, YOU HID MY CIGARETTES, DIDN'T YOU, ALL
LOOK, I'LL GIVE YOU A CIGARETTE IN A MINUTE, I'M ALRIGHT
I'M SORRY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT STIMULATES YOU SO MUCH
TOM, PLEASE! IT'S NOT WHAT IT SEEMS! I'M DOING IT BECAUSE I REALLY DOESN'T...

ALAN: Well, I suppose that really it's something that couldn't have happened until the advent of the mini-series, mainly because . . . well, say for example that **Julie Schwartz** had decided to do it in SUPERMAN in the 1960s. By the time the 1980s rolled around, the DC Universe would be an incredibly baroque and unrecognizable place that would have no bearing upon the real experience of the readers. And, of course, all of their heroes are set there — not just Superman — because it's sort of a cross-reference universe, in which all of the characters coexist. But with the advent of the mini-series, the maxi-series, or whatever, and the direct-sales market, it has become *possible* to create a number of characters that are designed only to exist for the duration of that series.

It's a bit like the sort of freedom that all book authors enjoy, you know. There was no call for **Charles Dickens** to write DAVID COPPERFIELD II: STEERFORTH STRIKES BACK. *(Laughter.)* There was no need for that. The characters were only designed to endure for the length of the novel, and once they had reached the end of their natural life span he could forget about them forever, which means that you can do *anything* with them — and that is a freedom which comic writers haven't had for a long while, because the characters are designed to live forever, if possible, as long as sales will allow them to. So there hasn't been really any opportunity until recently for some-

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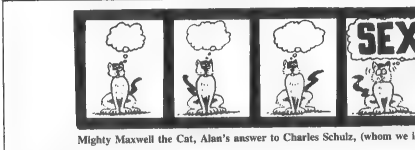


Mighty Maxwell the Cat, Alan's answer to Charles Schulz, (whom we interviewed last issue!)

one to actually create an entirely altered parallel world based upon that premise.

DARREL: *And also, I suppose, usually whoever is writing or drawing a comic, they do it as if it's taking place in the contemporary world at the moment, rather than something that has been built up over years and years and diverged?*

ALAN: Sure. I think that's it, that you have to sort of . . . it takes a little jump in thinking to realize if Superman were to come to our world that very shortly it would not be our world at all — because his presence would have *altered* it in one way or another. I mean, there have been other people who have explored to some degree the possibilities of that. I believe Marvel did the SQUADRON SUPREME series, which I saw a couple of issues of.

DARREL: *We could go back to Wally Wood's THUNDER AGENTS in the '60s.*

ALAN: Sure, that's it. There have been various attempts to sort of integrate superheroes with the real world, but I don't think to such an extent as we have on WATCHMEN. I think that WATCHMEN has taken it a bit further than it has been previously. Oh, I should point out, by the way, on a related note to that subject, that the third book of MIRACLEMAN to some degree does take it even further. The territory of the third book of MIRACLEMAN in some ways takes on from an imaginary story, one of the better Superman imaginary stories, which was the story of "Superman Red/Superman Blue."

DARREL: *Oh, yes, a classic!*

ALAN: This was a story in which Superman, by some bizarre quirk of Red Kryptonite and fate, manages to solve all of the problems in the world forever — which, of course, you could never do in a regular comic book. But we're doing something not 1,000 miles away from that in the third book of MIRACLEMAN; which, like I say, is another take upon how the presence of superheroes would alter the world. It's a much different look at it than the conclusions that we arrived at with WATCHMEN.

DARREL: *Are you completely satisfied with the conclusion in WATCHMEN?*

ALAN: I think so. I mean, yeah, of course. It doesn't really matter whether I am or not, it's for the reader's eye, you know. I think I'm completely satisfied with it, yeah. I mean, I'm still too close to having — well, I spent two years or so working upon WATCHMEN, from its original inception — and I'm still too close to it to be able to make any judgements like that. I should imagine I would have to get six months to a year away before I could look back and say whether it really worked exactly as well as it might have done.

But I'm satisfied that to the best of both mine and Dave's ability, we've managed to sort of pull off something which I think lives up to the promise of the earlier episodes. Dave was saying that he thinks it's as good a last issue as the first one was a first issue, and I tend to agree with him.

DARREL: *Also with WATCHMEN you've taken the limited series a step further than it has been taken before, with the background notes and . . . the story is very non-linear, which you don't find in most comic books . . .*

ALAN: Well, I don't know so much that . . . well, I suppose yeah, I suppose that you could say that it was non-linear, in that it does have a number of flashbacks in it. But it is a *fairly* linear structure.

DARREL: *It is progressive.*

ALAN: Oh, certainly. We have tried to do some things within that structure that are novel, and I think that probably, if we've done anything with WATCHMEN, we've tried to sort of bring the sensibilities of a novel to the maxi-series, because the maxi-series would seem to me to be perfect vehicle for the creation of comic-book novels. To use **Dickens** again as an example, most of his books were serialized in sort of, you know, weekly magazines — so there's no disgrace in writing serials — and they still can combine at the end of their run into a whole and coherent novel.

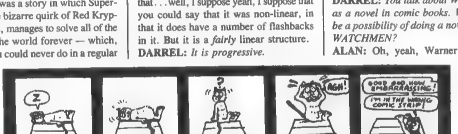
So I think that what we did when we approached WATCHMEN was to design it *as* a novel. We knew what was in each of the twelve chapters. We *knew* the various design elements, so that we could work upon it as a coherent whole, and just produce it as that. There isn't going to be a sequel to WATCHMEN.

DARREL: *Ah, darn.*

ALAN: It's not going to be like a regular comic book, you know. No one need hang around with bated breath wondering whether we're going to have Dr. Manhattan meeting Captain Atom or crossovers or another sort of a sequel to it — because it's not going to happen. WATCHMEN is a complete work. And that is one of the benefits of working within that sort of maxi-series format. It's not anything that I've been able to do before; I couldn't do it with SWAMP THING. But by and large I think that we're pleased with the way that the experiment has turned out.

DARREL: *You talk about WATCHMEN as a novel in comic books. Would there be a possibility of doing a novelization of WATCHMEN?*

ALAN: Oh, yeah, Warner Books are



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"We tried a comics work that no other

handling it. They are going to be bringing it out in, I suppose, the same format that — oh, a prose novel you mean?

DARREL: *Yes.*

ALAN: No. I certainly wouldn't want to write it. *(Laughter.)* As far as I'm concerned the *purest* expression of WATCHMEN is as a comic book.

DARREL: *But there will be a deluxe edition?*

ALAN: Yeah. That will be a comic book, with the emphasis upon *book*. It will be a deluxe hardback edition, and *that* is the way that I would like to see it. It will be a massive, thick book, you know, which me and Dave have decided will look just great with the inch-thick WATCHMEN logo down the spine. So we're looking forward to that, but as for turning it into a prose novel, I don't see that there would be any point; and I don't know if you could, because there would be so much of the essential background data out of WATCHMEN that you can get into in a comic book but which you couldn't get into a prose novel without it being ponderous and clumsy. One of the things that we've done with WATCHMEN is to try and come up with a work of comic art that has *effects* in it which no other medium could successfully duplicate. That goes for novels and for films, as well.

That said, I have got as much confidence as it is possible to have in the people who are handling the WATCHMEN film. **Sam Hamm** is an excellent screenwriter, he's been signed to write the WATCHMEN film. I think that it's got, therefore, as good a chance as any of being a good film.

But that said, I still maintain that the *best* expression of WATCHMEN is liable to be as a comic book. I mean, the film might be even better in its own way, but I think that because we did try consciously with WATCHMEN to come up with effects that no other medium could duplicate, and to establish a range of effects that were unique to comic books, then I think that it would be to some degree pointless to do it as a novel — and although I'm interested in seeing what is done of it as a film, you know, I would say that even there . . . I think that sort of it will be different. It can't be the same thing, because I don't think the thing as it stands is translatable.

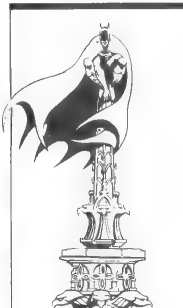
DARREL: *I hadn't known there was a film in the works.*

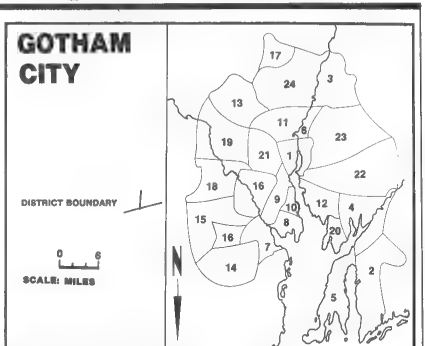
ALAN: Yeah, 20th Century-Fox have optioned WATCHMEN as a film. The producers are **Joel Silver** and **Larry Gordon,** who where the producers of 48 HOURS. And if I could take this opportunity just to scotch rumors that have been circulating wildly elsewhere that **Walter Hill** has got something to do with it — he hasn't. I think the rumors originated because someone had heard that there was a connection with 48 HOURS and because **Walter Hill** was the director of that film, people assumed that he was therefore connected with WATCHMEN. He's not. It was the producers of that film, **Joel Silver** and **Larry Gordon.**

I've spoken to **Joel Silver,** he seems very enthusiastic and has a good track record of getting films actually made. That said, of course, we've been hearing about

Alan used the map and historical notes from the Mayfair/DC roleplaying game (reprinted partially on opposite page) for reference in SWAMP THING #52. Note the allusions to Evanstown, Gotham Village and Uptown. Also, the toppling statue of Jon Logerquist, who founded Gotham City. More allusions follow on the following pages

medium could duplicate. Novels, films. . . ”





From the Gamemaster's Manual: A map of Gotham City. Numbered neighborhoods include The Bowery (12), where Bruce Wayne's parents were killed, and Bristol (5) where Wayne Manor is.

maneuverability. The warehouses are constructed of aluminum sheeting over a steel skeleton, although a few brick buildings exist.

There is no residential housing in the Waterfront area, although a few transients live there.

The docks themselves are equipped with cranes, and bulldozer-like vehicles used to tow huge skids of cargo. There are dozens of forklifts around the docks, usually kept behind a chain link fence when not in use.

11)Uptown

Uptown was once THE neighborhood in which to live in Gotham, but that position has been usurped by Bristol and Neville. It has not deteriorated as much as it has become socially mixed. You can find the professional, the factory worker, the small shop owner, the very rich, and the rather weird, all living in Uptown. Residential hotels which charge several thousand dollars a month in rent are next to free legal clinics, and a Rolls Royce Silver Spirit will often be parked next to a Ford Escort. Uptown is a very tolerant neighborhood, and the mix of people here makes it the most vibrant of Gotham's neighborhoods. . . at least in the opinion of Uptowners. Gotham Park is located in Uptown.

Vicki Vale, photographer for Picture News Magazine, lives in Uptown.

12) The Bowery

The Bowery was originally a farm owned by Jon Logerquist, the founder of Gotham City. The British burned the farm after Logerquist refused to pay taxes to the Crown. Logerquist was killed in the fire.

The Bowery has had an unsavory reputation ever since the days of Logerquist. The majority of the ghost stories of Gotham have their origin in the Bowery.

Unlike other districts of Gotham, the Bowery has never had any glory days. The neighborhood has always been unsavory. Many of Gotham's most notorious criminals took advantage of the superstitions surrounding the Bowery to cover for their criminal activities.

Crime Alley, where Bruce Wayne's parents were killed, is located in the Bowery

13)Glendale

Glendale was a separate town until the 1930's when it was annexed by Gotham. It still has the flavor of a city-within-a-city, with a central post office, city hall (now the offices of state representatives and county officials, including the Gotham County Sheriff's Department), and a downtown area which is a miniature version of Gotham's Central Business district. Many Glendale residents still believe Glendale to be a separate entity, calling Gotham "the other city".

Glendale is the location for the Glendale Institute of Technology (G.I.T), one of the finest in the country. The Institute is often called the "S.T.A.R. Labs farm team". G.I.T. has a fierce, but hopeless, sports rivalry with Gotham University. G.I.T.'s infamous team cheer is "They've scored again, that's Okay! They'll all work for us someday!".

14)Evanstown

Evanstown still has the atmosphere of a small town, with single-family houses on ¼ acre plots predominating, with no building rising more than four stories. The crime rate here is remarkably low, and community spirit is high. Evanstown has four times as many Little League teams as any other neighborhood in Gotham.

Police Commissioner James Gordon and his daughter, Barbara, live in Evanstown.

15)Irving Grove

Irving Grove is an upper-middle class neighborhood, with small housing developments on the edge of the Dayton Forest Preserve.

The Dayton Forest Preserve, now a national park, was established by Nathaniel Dayton, a wealthy manufacturer who wanted to preserve some of the woodlands which had once surrounded Gotham. The Forest Preserve is a quiet, pleasant place with paths for biking and hiking. It is also rumored to contain the loot from two of Gotham's most famous crimes: the Greyscout Armored Car Robbery of 1974 ($4.4 million) and the Royal Canton Jewel heist of 1960 ($3.6 million).

16)Gotham Village

Recently renamed, the character of the area is best described by its former title: Gotham Industrial Park. After a failed attempt to attract new industry to Gotham, the city has tried to convert the area into low-rent housing. The area has several respectable housing developments, but the district is one of the grayer districts of Gotham. Several Gotham Village residents have moved back into Bryantown rather than live in Gotham Village.

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"THE BATMAN screenplay is very, very good."

SILVER SURFER and X-MEN films for the past 200 years to my certain knowledge. *(Laughter.)* Whether the film is actually made or not is completely in the air, and how it turns out is in the lap of the gods. It's beyond my control. But, you know, they've got Sam Hamm as writer of it, who is a very good, promising, new screenwriter, and has also got a good background and interest in comics and is the screenwriter, I believe, upon the new BATMAN film, as well.

DARREL: *That's another one we've been hearing about for a long time!*

ALAN: Yeah. Well, they finally, I believe, have got a screenplay that everybody's happy with. I still don't know whether that will be made, but I've read the screenplay and if they make a film that is true to that screenplay, I don't think that many BATMAN fans will be disappointed. It's very, very good. I've spoken to Sam, I went out to lunch with him — he came to Northampton and had lunch with me — and I've got complete faith in him. I believe that he will try his *best* to make the film as faithful to the experience of reading WATCHMEN as he can. I believe he's got a lot of respect for the material, and that's all that I can ask for really, and I'm prepared to sort of stand by what he does.

DARREL: *On films — this is taking a bit of an aside — two years ago Ramsey Campbell spoke in COMICS INTERVIEW #22 of a problem that you were having in England with videocassettes being released that hadn't gone through the film censors, causing great outrage in some circles, and I was wondering if you could maybe update that for us.*

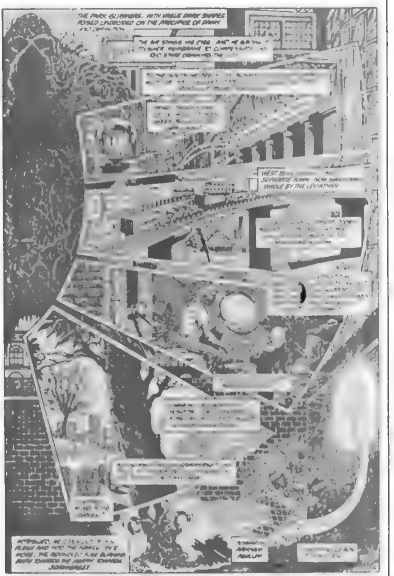
ALAN: Well, we still basically have a situation over here where we have a conservative government which amongst its supporters has a number of extreme pressure groups, which I should imagine would be quite similar in tone to some of your fundamentalist right groups over there. There are also things like the Viewers and Listeners Association, which is a very starched and upright Christian woman named **Mary Whitehouse** who seems to believe that it's her holy duty to determine what other people should read or listen to or enjoy, according to her own principles. So basically we do still have calls for censorship of videos and stuff like that.

Ramsey was probably a lot better informed about the situation than I am, because I think he's probably closer to the film world than I — well, to that part of it, anyway — than I was, and probably more knowledgeable. But, yeah, I think the situation is still pretty much the same. There are still some quite sinister groups sort of pushing to get censorship, and if **Mrs. Thatcher** does win the next election there is a fair chance that there will be a new bill pushed through Parliament which will redefine *obscenity* as "that which is likely to offend a reasonable person."

DARREL: *Gasp!*

ALAN: I'm sure that any eleven-year-old out there could tell me what was wrong with that as a proposed amendment to a law. I mean, for one thing, it presupposes that anybody has got the faintest idea what a "reasonable person" is. I would like to think of myself as a reasonable person, you know, so therefore the bill should extend to anything which is liable to offend *me*, which is not very much at all — or, you know, presumably there would be a lot of conservative MPs who would think of themselves as being reasonable people and me as being a completely unreasonable person. *(Laughter.)*

But basically it would give whatever party was in charge of the country complete license to ban whatever they wanted to, on moral grounds, on political grounds, on religious grounds, upon whatever. It's the same situation, but getting worse by slow degrees over the years. If the conservations do have a third team, I should imagine that there is a fair chance we may have some sort of legislation like that



"If somebody reads, then goes out and behaves

pushed through, if the conservation government survives with a majority that is strong enough to push through that sort of legislation.

DARREL: *Well, that's depressing, but at least there's still a chance.*

ALAN: Yeah, well, there's still a chance; and, of course, I should imagine that if it is pushed through there will be a large number — well, I'd like to think there will be a large number — of people over here fighting against it and protesting against it as *vocally* as they possibly can. I know that I shall certainly be amongst them if it should come to it, you know. There's always hope. Hope springs enternal in the human breast.

DARREL: *We spoke about WATCHMEN being adapted into film; another area into which WATCHMEN has been adapted is the role-playing game field. Did you have any input with the people at Mayfair Games?*

ALAN: Yes, I did. Dan Greenberg, who did the first game, and Ray Winninger, who has done the second, both called me up and I spent a long time talking to them about the background of the WATCHMEN'S world, filling in the background details for them, so that they would know exactly what the chronology of the world was and how it was all set up. I did that with the pair of them, then they suggested sort of ideas for the games and they sounded perfectly good to me, so I okayed them. Generally, I was there to provide backup information and stuff like that, but I approved both of the games and I thought that both of them — I've seen both of them now and I think, of that kind of game, they look as if they're very, very good. A lot of care has been put into them and I'm quite pleased by the . . . well, the care that's been taken to make sure that, you know, they fit in with the WATCHMEN universe in the most minute detail. I'm quite impressed by that.

DARREL: *There's a rumor going around that you turned over all of your notes to Mayfair Games for their use in putting together these games.*

ALAN: I don't know; I mean, they may have had access to the notes, they may have got them from DC, but they certainly didn't get them from me because I — well, I just *lose* things like that. I haven't got any sort of old notes and things like that. I just throw them out, because if I kept them they'd take up too much house room, you know.

DARREL: *Gaming's a different kind of adaptation — they're not doing the story so much as they're replicating the world and the characters. I have to say, the idea of some people out there emulating some of those characters frightens me a little bit.*

ALAN: What, do you mean in a role-playing game.?

DARREL: *Not in the game. I imagine most people will do it during the game and then set it down when it's over. But I don't want to have any Rorschachs running around.*

ALAN: Well, I don't know, I've always tended to think that was pretty spurious, anyway. If there *is* somebody out there who is going to read WATCHMEN and is going to then go out and behave like Rorschach, I honestly wouldn't feel the slightest bit of blame or responsibility for that. Quite frankly, if there is anybody out there whose mind is upon a hair trigger that *fine*, so that they could be sort of influenced and overtaken by a *(laughter)* fictitious comic-book character, then obviously the factors that have brought their mind to that state have something to do with society or their parents and have nothing to do with me. Equally as obviously, then, if they haven't seen Rorschach and been influenced by him, it would have been a news bulletin the next day, or a television program the next day, or a film the day after that or, you know, a record the day after that. If people are that suggestible, then I would say that the flaw is with the society that's made them like that, not with whatever obsession they happened to latch onto.

So, no, I would imagine that . . . I don't really see . . . I mean, if someone is going to emulate a character they are much more likely to emulate a big, tough, impossible hero like Rambo or **Clint Eastwood**

"If Superman were to come to our world, very shortly it would not be our world at all — because his presence would have altered it." Enter: Dr. Manhattan.

already. He knows Captain Metropolis played the kidnapping of Wally Weaver and the others

It is vital, however, that the Player not act on this information and confront Captain Metropolis because, in his timeline, Dr Manhattan did not confront Captain Metropolis in the past, is not confronting Captain Metropolis in the present, and will not confront him in the future. Dr. Manhattan is tied to his timeline and while he knows the future, he cannot alter it.

In brief, the GM could just tell the Player about Captain Metropolis' involvement or if the GM chooses to do so, he or she should make it implicit that Manhattan not become involved. If the Player complains that he/she should have been told of Metropolis' plan because Dr Manhattan would have known, the GM could tell the Player it was the only realistic way to keep Manhattan from inappropriately acting on the information. Besides, the GM was tied to a timeline that did not include telling the Player

Read the following to the Dr. Manhattan Player (but not in the presence of other Players)

In terms of the play of the adventure, the addition of Dr. Manhattan to the group could make it ridiculously simple for the heroes to achieve their objectives, especially if Manhattan is to played like any other hero. Keep in mind that Dr. Manhattan is not like any other hero.

Dr. Manhattan is inordinately detached from his humanity and prefers to observe a situation rather than act upon it. When he does act, he does not always do what most fingers would perceive as the most tactically advantageous. Instead, his actions are based on mysterious, unfathomable motivations.

To simulate this in the game, use his Catastrophic Irrational Attraction to knowledge of the physical world.

In play, whenever you feel Manhattan should take some action, make an Irrational Attraction check. Only if the roll is 18 or more will Manhattan make the action. Otherwise he will stand and observe impassively. In addition, you cannot roll for an action more than once, unless the situation dramatically changes.

For example, suppose Dr. Manhattan and Rorschach meet a thug who mocks Rorschach. The Player wants Dr. Manhattan to Teleport the thug into orbit and let him blow the evil Dr. Manhattan will observe the situation, hand on his chin, until the thug knocks Rorschach down and directly attacks Dr. Manhattan

Also, the GM can call for a Miscellaneous Action check at any appropriate time. If the GM feels an action is based on human qualities that the Doctor lacks or is just plain inappropriate to Dr. Manhattan, the GM will ask for a roll. If the roll is 18 or more, the action may continue. (Note that this is in addition to the Irrational Attraction Roll.)

A second option for playing Dr. Manhattan is to simply play him as he is in the Watchmen series. Good role-playing can convince the GM to let you, the Player, treat the Character naturally, rather than artificially by limiting the powers through game mechanics contrivances. If he is played in Character, Manhattan will not rip through the adventure in record time. To do so would be gaudy, almost vulgar, a style quite unlike

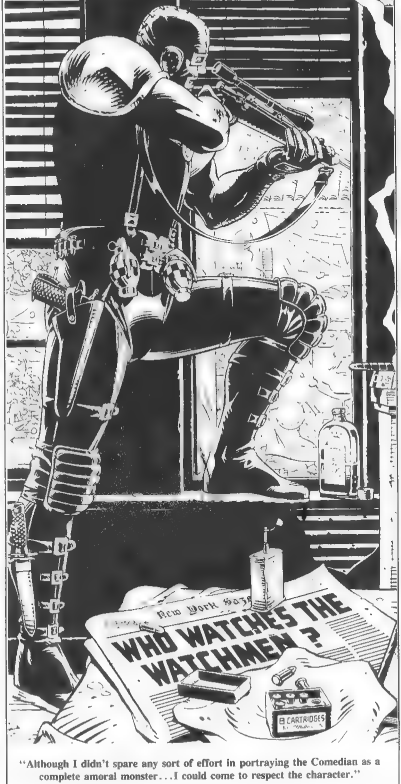
like Rorschach, I wouldn't feel responsible."

or one of *those* people that's made to look perfect and strong, with an answer for everything. I don't think Rorschach is made to look a very attractive character at all. He has got a lot of sexual problems, a lot of mental problems, he lives in squalor, you know. I really don't think that I've glamorized that kind of life.

DARREL: *That's certainly true. The characters in WATCHMEN are pretty extreme, some of them. Obviously, they've been designed that way. In most comic books, there is a lot of care and love put into the characters, and then people kind of latch onto them — I get the feeling that you don't want people latching onto the characters in WATCHMEN that way.*

ALAN: Well, I think that all of the characters have a great deal of care put into their creation, but what I've tried to do is just not make it so *obvious*, because I don't like this very simple, cheap and ultimately *use less* manipulation of the reader's emotions that seems to go on. Basically, most characters in comics are sort of anodyne ciphers. They're just complete blanks with, you know... well, their actual characteristics, they've got about all of the emotional depth of My Little Pony. *(Laughter.)* And consequently people tend to think of *those* sort of characters as nice, attractive, well-rounded characters. If they were to have those people around them in real life, they'd probably realize just how far short those comic-book characters fall of real personalities.

What I tried to do in WATCHMEN was to take a number of quite radically *diverse* characters, some of whom would be probably fairly well instantly likeable. I find Dan Dreiberg very likable. He's a very human character. I find Hollis Mason very likeable. I find the Silk Spectre likeable, both her and her mother. The strange thing is that, with characters like Rorschach and the Comedian, who politically and in the way they behave are the exact opposite of myself — and I should suspect of most of the readers out there — I was *pleased* with the way those characters turned out. Although I didn't spare any sort of effort in portraying the Comedian as a complete amoral monster, I found that while writing the stories I was starting to develop — not sympathy, that's too strong a word — a curious respect for him as a character, and the same applied for Rorschach. Even though I still found him loathsome, I could come to *respect* the character in a certain way; and I think that if I can accomplish that — it I can come up with two completely unlikable characters and then make the readers almost have a respect for them *despite* their unlikability — then that is



"Although I didn't spare any sort of effort in portraying the Comedian as a complete amoral monster... I could come to respect the character."

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"I was running out of ideas on S.T."

something which is much more difficult and much more worthwhile achieving than coming up with characters that are just obviously there as sickly pieces of marshmallow designed, you know, just to lure the readers sort of by their sweetness.

DARREL: *When you write, do you have a single philosophy that you use in approaching the art of writing that would be something universal with all of your work?*

ALAN: No. No, there's such a lot of different stories, and if I was just to try the same approach over and over again, I would have given up four or five years ago, because I would have been bored stupid. What I try to do is to sort of — obviously, there are certain techniques that I will use repeatedly, but it depends very much upon the story.

The only thing that is a constant throughout my work is that I *have* to be interested in what I'm writing, I have to be excited about what I'm writing, or it will just never communicate to the reader. So, yeah, I do try to sort of crank myself up to a certain level of intensity with each story that I'm writing, just purely to maintain my own interest for as long as it takes to write the story. That is the only sort of invariable rule that I could apply to my writing, just that the intensity must be there. Whether it's a humor story or a horror story or whatever, it doesn't matter — as long as my interest is at a certain level of intensity to get the story to work. But that is the only constant throughout my work. That is the only sort of thing that I always do, whatever story I am writing.

DARREL: *One recent issue of SWAMP THING, which kind of blew me away, was the collage issue that John Totleben did the art on. From what I've heard, he put together sort of sculptured pages that were somehow reproduced on paper, just putting together things he would find. Did you write out a story for him to do that to, or give him a general idea for the story?*

ALAN: No, what happened was that John suggested — well, this was towards the end of the run on SWAMP THING, and I had complained to John that I was sort of starting to run out of ideas. I was starting to wish that I had finished SWAMP THING ten issues earlier, because I was saying, "Look, I'm not sure that I can keep my enthusiasm up for these last ten issues, it's been a long slog and I'm starting to find everything that we're doing old hat." And John said that he'd had quite a radical idea, which was to do an issue entirely of full-page collages, which sounded pretty *strange* to me. So he said that what he would do was that he would go away and produce eight collage pictures without any plot, any script, any idea of what was going to happen; then he'd send those eight pages to me and I would sit and have to think about them, would work out the story *inspired* by what he was doing, and then I would write the remaining pages, send the script back to him, and he would complete the job.

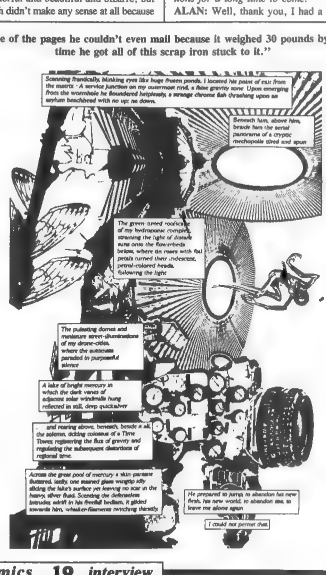
So what John was doing was going to the junk yards, taking backs off television sets, smashing up watches, sticking all of these bits of physical junk onto his artboard, as well as photographs of the Swamp Thing plastic head that he had made, and apparently one of the pages of art he couldn't even mail to **Karen Berger** because it weighed 30 pounds by the time he got all of this scrap iron stuck to it. And consequently John sent me about ten pages of *incomprehensible* stuff, which were wonderful and beautiful and bizarre, but which didn't make any sense at all because they weren't meant to, and then I sort of came up with a story that fitted around them, wrote a few extra pages of it, sent it back to John, and he finished off the art.

It was a totally different way of working, which was its attraction, really. We wanted to come up with a way of working that was different from the way that he had worked before, just to keep our interest up there. This is probably, I think, why, you will find that there is an increasing amount of strangeness and weirdness in SWAMP THING — because we had to keep making constant attempts to sort of upgrade the level of our interest, which meant doing something, you know, of increasingly radical difference every couple of issues.

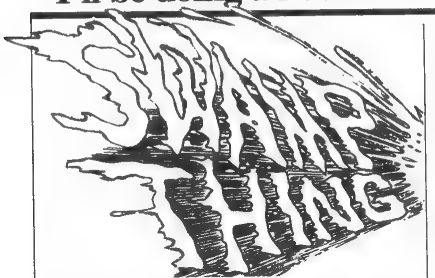
DARREL: *I think that particular issue is going to be a cherished classic in collections for a long time to come.*

ALAN: Well, thank you, I had a lot of

"One of the pages he couldn't even mail because it weighed 30 pounds by the time he got all of this scrap iron stuck to it."


Scanning frantically, blinking eyes like huge frozen ponds, I learned his point of exit from the matrix : A service junction on my outermost ring, a few gravity runs. Upon emerging from the wormhole he boundered helplessly, a strange chrome fish thrashing upon an asphalt beachhead with no sea to return to.
Beneath him, above him, beside him the aerial panorama of a cryptic mechanoids tired and spun
The green tinted roofscape of my burlesquoise complex, streaming the light of distant suns onto the flaw-riveted below, where the rosary with fail petals turned their iridescent, petrol-colored heads, following the light.
The pulsating domes and resonance arrest-shuttlestones of my drone-cities, where the automata paraded in purposeful silence
A lake of bright mercury in which the dark waves of subjective solar windmills hung reflected in still, deep quicksilver
and roaring above, beneath, beside it all, the solemn, ticking colossus of a Time Tower, registering the flux of gravity and regulating the subsequent distortions of temporal time.
Across the great pool of mercury a skin parasite fluttered, sadly, one enamel glass wingtip slicing the lake's surface yet leaving no scar in the happy, silvery fluid. Scenting the fishmeteors lurking adrift in his fleshly bedlam, it glided towards him, whale-clearness switching thereby
He presumed to pursue to abandon his new flesh, his new world, to abandon me, to leave me alone again
I could not permit that.

"I'll be doing a novel for Tor Books."



fun doing it, and I know John did as well. A lot of people . . . some people didn't like it. I mean, I had some people coming up to me and saying, "Well, it's not comic strip is it" — which is total shit, because *of course* it's comic strip. I mean, there is no fundamental difference in storytelling structure between SWAMP THING #60 and PRINCE VALIANT. It hasn't got balloons, no — neither has PRINCE VALIANT. It's got big detailed pictures with blocks of text, exactly the same as PRINCE VALIANT has. So in structure it's not that radical. It's the most basic sort of, you know, panels and captions; it's the most basic form of comic-book storytelling that there is. But a lot of people have become so conditioned by what they *think* of as comics, and have got such a narrow idea of what they think comics are; I think it's all to the good if occasionally you get artists and writers doing something which doesn't fall into those categories.

DARREL: *We've only got a few minutes left, so after your holiday — what's next for Alan Moore?*

ALAN: Well, during my holiday I'm going to be having a period of sort of evaluation. I'm going to work out what I've done over the past eight years and what I *want* to do over the next eight years.

I shall be spending much of the remainder of this year tying up a few loose ends. I shall be doing a novel for Tor Books — please don't ask me on what, yet, because I haven't got the faintest idea, but they have asked me to do one and I should like very much to oblige. I shall be finishing off V FOR VENDETTA, which I'm contracted to do for DC Comics. I shall be doing the MR. MONSTER/SWAMP THING team-up book, which although I am not strickly contracted to do it — because the contract expired — I still do feel a certain obligation to finish. It's a book I should like to do. So V FOR VENDETTA and the MR. MONSTER book shall finish all of my work for DC.

I shall be doing another three episodes of MIRACLEMAN, which will conclude MIRACLEMAN Book Three and my tenure on MIRACLEMAN, at least for the time being. I shall be doing a few of the things that I have promised to Fantagraphics Books, and a couple of other odds and ends. I'll be doing the cover to **Dark Horse's Basil Wolverton's** PLANET OF TERROR. That's an anthology comic and I shall be doing the cover to that. So there will be a few loose ends that I shall be tying up over the next year or 18 months, and *then* I'm basically hoping to reach some point of conclusion about what the current state of the comic market is.

I believe that there is a vast new audience — or, at least, a potential audience — waiting out there that have had their sort of palates tickled by the current state of, you know, well-produced comic books like **Art Spiegelman's** MAUS, DARK KNIGHT — hopefully, WATCHMEN would be included in that — and who although they are perhaps attracted to comic books for the first time and may be interested at least for a short while in a novel treatment of superheroes, will not be endlessly satisfied with novel treatments of superheroes and will shortly be wanting some more adult or more flexible fare. I hope to be able to sort of identify the audience that I think is out there, work out what needs to be done to expand it and to satisfy it, and proceed from there. I hope that it is going to generate some entirely new kinds of comics. So look for that in '88, but other than that, I really can't be any more specific. A lot of it is going to depend on what sort of conclusions I come to during this sort of two-month lie off.

"I had been handed the WATCHMEN game."

Alan Moore says there will be no sequel to WATCHMEN. However, a sequel of sorts already exists, thanks to the role-playing game industry, Mayfair Games and writer Daniel Greenberg. In fact, as I discovered while speaking with Dan, the WATCHMEN role-playing module (and actually, by the time you read this, a second module will be available) can be considered not only a sequel to WATCHMEN, but also an alternative vision of WATCHMEN. If you want to find out what that means, keep reading...

DARREL BOATZ: *I'm speaking with Daniel Greenberg, who likes to be called Daniel —*

DANIEL GREENBERG: Dan is fine, I just like to write under the name **Daniel Greenberg.**

DARREL: *And how does one carve out a career as a writer of role-playing games?*

DAN: I'd been playing role-playing games since I was in junior high school, and I'd been reading comics since elementary school — and it occurred to me when I was in college that the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventures that I was running were a lot better than a lot of the stuff that was being published. I decided to see if I could get mine published. I wrote some things, and it turned out to be remarkably easy to get published, and I've continued from there. I really enjoy making a living doing what I like to do. So I'm writing to help support an acting career, which hasn't taken off quite so well as the writing career has. I like to consider myself a renaissance man. I do a lot of everything. I do artwork, I write, I act, it's remarkable.

DARREL: *And you discovered comics in elementary school. Marvel? DC?*

DAN: I was heavily into Marvel. I was completely anti-DC. Now Marvel and DC have pretty much switched positions, DC from the entrenched, uncreative monolith in the industry and Marvel from the young dynamic company, and now Marvel is a monolithic entrenched corporation and DC is the exciting, up and coming, feisty young company. I haven't completely switched loyalties. Everything DC produces isn't fantastic and everything that Marvel produces isn't quite rotten, but it's close. *(Laughter.)*

I think that the alternate fields, the experimental fields, is where the real stuff is that's happening: WATCHMEN, DARK KNIGHT, BEANWORLD, things like that. That's where the *real* excitement is in comics right now. All of the experimental stuff that's actually out on a limb, where people are taking a chance and playing with the whole *concept* of what comics are about. That's where the most exciting work right now is being done in comics. They're not endlessly reinventing the wheel, with the New Universe and stuff like that.

Daniel Greenberg's famous attempt to make the GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS by putting his foot in his mouth.

Photo by Doug R. Ziegler

DANIEL GREENBERG

DARREL: *So you discovered gaming —*

DAN: Around high school, shortly before the big D&D boom. When D&D first came out, I discovered it with the very first printing, and it was real *exciting*! It was a lot of what I'd been wanting for a long time, which was a chance to...

DARREL: *To experience?*

DAN: Right, exactly. Instead of just reading a book or watching a movie, to actually project yourself into it and

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"Roleplaying was formed by people who

vicariously experience it in a much more direct way.

DARREL: *I wish role-playing games were around when I was younger so I could have gotten involved with them when I had the time to really pursue something like that. I've been looking into it, more or less, for the last ten years, but I never really find the time to invest in it. But it seems like a really great situation. I can remember when I was eight or ten or whatever, reading a comic book or a paperback or something and just sitting down and imagining these characters beyond the stories they were in.*

DAN: Right, beyond the scope of just what the writer came up with. I did, too, and I thought after awhile, "Well, that's good, but what if this happened, what if the character did this? This would have been much more intelligent." A lot of times writers put their characters in fairly contrived situations to get to the result that they want. That kind of thing doesn't really happen in role-playing games because the characters say, "No way." *(Laughter.)* You know, it's my character's life, this is what he's going to do. He's going to respond to this intelligently.

DARREL: *Each player controls his own character, so it . . . well, it can be directed by the gamesmaster, but not in so overt a fashion?*

DAN: Exactly. The gamesmaster can try to manipulate it, but the games are much more fun when the gamesmaster just lets the players react as the players would have the characters react, *exactly* as they want them to. Yeah, it is very exciting, and when a game is working out right, when there's really good synergy between the gamesmaster and the players, the adventure can really take off. The *excitement* and the *charge*, the emotional *punch* of the game, can reach heights far beyond anything you're going to experience in a movie or a book!

It doesn't happen all of the time. It takes a really good combination, it takes people really wanting to have it happen; but when it happens I've seen acting in role playing games that actually surpasses a lot of professional work I've seen, in terms of sheer honesty and credibility of delivery. You see, in theater, one of the things that actors *struggle* for is to be honest on stage, to deal honestly with the emotions or the situations that the character is involved with, and not come off contrived, because we can tell when an actor is really being fakey. You can really tell.

DARREL: *You have to get into character and not break character and still draw it all from within yourself?*

DAN: Right, exactly. I've seen totally unskilled, untrained — you know, people who are not trained actors — play their characters with as much emotional credibility or *more* credibility than actors who have studied for years just to be able to do just that. So I've actually used role-playing games with my fellow actors that I've coached and have acted with, and I've seen some really good results with it. I haven't really taken it as far as I could. I know that **Greg Stafford** of Chaosium has been working with role-playing games in education, and I think that's a very exciting project. I think role-playing games have a lot of potential in actor training, and that's something I am going to be working on somewhere down the road.

DARREL: *The thing about role-playing games in education is that, of course, any teacher is going to have to have the curriculum approved, but with role-playing games —*

DAN: Gaming is experimental. It's not rote memorization, it's not lecture and regurgitation on a test — it's not dull, dry standard education. It's a chance for the students to get right into the guts of the

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Daniel Greenberg
Born: 1 January 1962 — Staten Island, New York
Current Residence: Washington, D.C.
Occupation: Writer/Actor
Training: B.A. in Theater from George Mason University
Credits: I've written a slew of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS material, including ELVES; the WATCHMEN module; a GHOSTBUSTERS adventure called "Hot Rods of the Gods"; THEY SAVED QUEEN VICTORIA'S BRAIN: CROSSROADS ADVENTURE books; WITCHFIRES OF LETH and INTO CHINA.
Favorite Writers: Alan Moore, Daniel Pinkwater, Frank Miller, John Steinbeck, Tom Robbins, Richard Bach
Pet Peeve: I don't really have one. I pretty much really enjoy the world.

situation and really experience it. I mean, you know, imagine playing an American Indian in pre-Columbian times, you get a much stronger *feel* for what that kind of situaiton is like, and that whole environment, that whole culture, becomes much more exciting, much more vibrant. I've run historical games before, and the thing that I find that it does most often is it gets people very interested in the culture. They immediately want to find out as much as they can about it, and do their own reading on their own time. They're independently motivated to do that. I've seen that happen with kids who would *never* have willingly opened a textbook, suddenly they're scouring the school library to find information about, like, France around the time of THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

It's funny, because what we know of as a role-playing game today was not what the original designers of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS had in mind when they created the game. Role-playing, as we know it, was kind of formulated by the thousands of people who ended up playing it and actually *misinterpreted* what the whole part to the original DUNGEONS & DRAGON set was. The original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was very much a war game. There was very little emphasis on role-playing. You could have just as easily been playing a tank or an armored personnel carrier that had a fireball spell.

DARREL: *The kind of game where you would just play out, you know, Patton's battles or whatever?*

DAN: Right, exactly. D&D was a game like that. I've spoken to **Dave Arneson** — as a matter of fact, I did an interview with him for a magazine about the early days of D&D — and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was created basically as a chance to have another type of minatures war game, except this time set in dungeons and sort of a CONAN-type setting instead of, you know, Prussian troops on the battlefield. They published the rules for it, and the people at TSR were very surprised to see how people had interpreted the game. All of a sudden the characters weren't just tromping around dungeons and killing things; they were actually creating cities for the characters to adventure in, and various sort of non-player characters that their characters could meet and talk with — and whole games would go by and *nothing* would get killed, no money would be taken, and no experience points, which was the original sole purpose of the game, no experience points would be gained. The players and the gamesmasters were having a tremendous

misinterpreted DUNGEONS & DRAGONS"

This is the only group shot of the Watchmen ever drawn!

"I tried to interest Mayfair in a Dark

amount of *fun* doing something that was not originally intended, which was having the role-playing experience.

DARREL: *So the consumers more-or-less refined the role-playing game?*

DAN: Right. And the people at TSR, being pretty shrewd, picked up on that and started hiring people who were playing those kinds of games, and refining what they were doing with D&D. So basically the whole creation of the role-playing game process was much more of a synergy than just, you know, the idea of a couple of people and then everyone else picked up on it. The modern role-playing game as we know it was simultaneously invented all over the country — actually, all over the world — by people who bought the game and saw a lot more potential in it than the original designers had, and that's very exciting.

DARREL: *A lot of the consumers became insiders at that point?*

DAN: Exactly, people who were inspired to. Everyone tinkered with the original D&D rules. I mean the original D&D rules just didn't work. I don't know anybody who really plays it completely by the book. I mean, I know some people who have tried. *(Laughter.)* Their games, from what I've seen, aren't very exciting. But just about everybody picks and chooses what rules they want to use, even rewrites some of them, or comes up with their own rules entirely; and some of these rule systems out D&D *D&D*. The game RUNEQUEST, for example, from Chaosium, is an excellent example of a fascinating rule system that is not nearly as encumbering as D&D and still takes into account a lot of complex factors. So games like that started to come out, and the whole industry broadened as everybody tried to put out the perfect role-playing game. And, of course, that's still going on.

DARREL: *Let's bring it forward now to your work with the WATCHMEN module. How did you get involved with doing a WATCHMEN module?*

DAN: Well, Mayfair was the first company that published my work professionally. I wrote a number of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS projects that did very well for them. But at the time I wrote the WATCHMEN module I was branching out and I was writing other things. I was writing a GHOSTBUSTERS adventure. I was writing choose-your-own paperback adventures, the CROSSROADS adventures. And I was with Mayfair from the time they did their DC HEROES game. I helped them play-test it and helped refine some of it, and I was very interested in

Photo by Doug R. Ziegler

adventures with some of the DC characters. I did a SUPERMAN adventure.

And around that time I was hearing scuttlebutt in the industry about **Alan Moore**'s new project — and I was an **Alan Moore** fan from way back. I'd heard something about a project that he was proposing for DC's newly acquired Charlton characters, and I had heard that it was pretty sweeping in scope and that it would create so many changes that the Charlton characters would be essentially unusable afterwards. Well, he didn't get the go-ahead to use the Charlton characters but they did give him the go-ahead for the series. They were very excited about it. So I decided to follow up on this. I had tried to interest Mayfair in a DARK KNIGHT adventure before DARK KNIGHT came out, and they thought that because they were doing a BATMAN adventure it would be meaningless. Well, they found out. *(Laughter.)* So I told them that a WATCHMEN adventure would be great, and they agreed. The guy who was in charge of Mayfair's role-playing games at that point, **Cory Glaberson,** we were very much on the same wavelength about what we wanted to see out in terms of product. So I took a trip up to New York to meet with **Bob Greenberger,** no relation, who. . .

DARREL: *He was the editor in charge of CRISIS and —*

DAN: Right, CRISIS and WATCHMEN. And I basically asked him a lot of questions about the new DC Universe, because I was *very* excited about the changes that were going on and how we could reflect that in more Mayfair products in the DC HEROES role-playing game line. And I also talked especially about WATCHMEN. Right before I went up I had been handed the WATCHMEN assignment from Mayfair, even though nothing of WATCHMEN existed except for a three-page outline. But from that I was *very* excited! It was a very different kind of adventure. So I went to New York and talked with him about that, got enough information to get started on an adventure, and that was the beginning of it. I talked to **Alan Moore** a couple of times about what was going to happen in the adventure, and to talk about details on the games.

DARREL: *When I spoke with Alan, he said that primarily what he wanted to do was make sure that you guys understood the world of WATCHMEN and the characters themselves.*

DAN: Right, because there is a mood and a flavor to WATCHMEN that is unique in comics. I think that your standard sock'em-up adventure, your standard comic book adventure — I don't think the state of the art in comic-book adventures is all that advanced. It was a long way to go before it really comes into its own. But the standard format for the adventure wouldn't work.

DARREL: *Well, I just want to inject a personal observation: the standard format is perfectly fine for the standard comic book that is aimed at the eight- to twelve-year-old market.*

DAN: Yeah, that's a good point. Also, the whole role-playing industry is brand new and *it* has a lot of maturing to do. If you remember where the comic-book industry was ten years into comic books, you know, there's still a good deal of refinement to go. But, yeah, essentially it is pretty much like where the mainstream is. But that would not work for WATCHMEN. It was very important that Alan explain *exactly* what it was that he was trying to do with the series and the characters; and not so much any one thing, but just explaining in detail about the particulars, it gave me a really solid feeling for it even though the comic book didn't exist yet at the time I started working on it.

DARREL: *That must have been frightening.*

DAN: That's one way to look at it.

DARREL: *Or thrilling.*

DAN: Yeah. I chose to find it very challenging and very exciting, to be on the ground floor of something like that. It's

Knight adventure before D.K. came out."

purely a matter of how you look at it, really. It's purely a matter of how you want to think about it. But what I decided was most important to capture was that mood, and so I created the whole adventure as kind of an investigation against an invisible opponent. And also I put in kind of a parallel to what's going on in the WATCHMEN series. In the WATCHMEN comic, as was revealed in issue #11, Ozymandias has been behind a lot of the mysterious happenings in the series; the death of the Comedian, the disappearance of Jon — and so I decided to parallel that in my WATCHMEN adventure. I'm not going to say exactly how, because the adventure is still on sale — it should have quite a bit of life left in it and I don't want to quite give away exactly what happens — but I've talked to a couple of critics and reviewers in the comic-book and the gaming worlds, and a few people have picked up on it and have commented on the parallels. That was very exciting to me, to put it in deliverately in hopes that it would be received, and then to see it well received.

DARREL: *As I understand it, the first WATCHMEN module is a '60s adventure with the Crimebusters?*

DAN: Exactly. It's all the main characters of WATCHMEN: Rorschach, Captain Metropolis, Nite Owl, Ozymandias, the Silk Spectre, the Comedian, and Dr. Manhattan. It takes place just after the first meeting of the Crimebusters, that first aborted meeting where Captain Metropolis tried to form them into a group and they ended up going their own separate ways. The whole set-up for the adventure is that somebody close to each of the main characters has been kidnapped. The adventure begins with the investigation of each kidnapping, and then a follow-up on clues to see exactly what's going on — and a number of blind alleys and red herrings — and a mystery, just like in the comic, that is presented there to be unravelled.

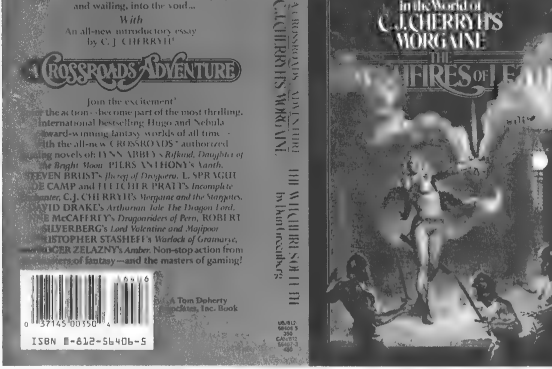
DARREL: *Sounds intriguing to me.*

DAN: That's the feedback I've been getting on it. *(Laughter.)* That is very exciting.

DARREL: *With the Watchmen themselves, there's a few questions that have really been running through my head that I didn't get a chance to speak with Alan Moore about, and one of them is the world of WATCHMEN, itself. Basically, from what I've seen in the series, it's the same as our world, up until 1938, when Hooded Justice started playing the costumed vigilante hero adventurer. The divergence begins there, but then what happens?*

DAN: My understanding of it from talking to Alan is that, yeah, the divergence basically starts with heroes. The existence of costumed heroes in the '40s did make a big splash culturally, but not a tremendous impact other than that. When the '60s came along, however, and you've got Dr. Manhattan, the world in general takes a quantum leap into new possibilities — and also with Ozymandias's manipulations behind the scenes. Between the technology that Jon creates and Ozymadias's manipulations, the world takes off in a totally different way. Electric cars are possible. Personal airships are possible. So basically the *picture* of the world is different. Fashions begin to change. Basically, what Alan and Dave have done is create a world that is so *close* that it basically is our world, but with enough difference to be mysterious and almost a little bit threatening.

DARREL: *I could see where that would*



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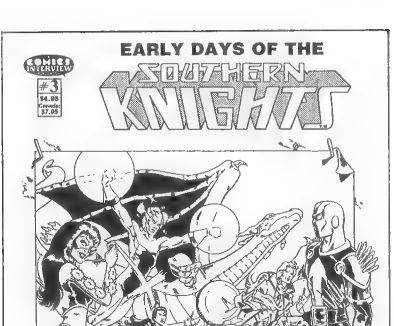

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DANIEL GREENBERG

"I made Dr. Manhattan a non-player."

be a little bit easier to work with in a simulation like a role-playing game than something like DUNGEONS & DRAGONS; but, on the other hand, with DUNGEONS & DRAGONS you are not limited by what you know is out there.

DAN: Right. You are limited by the things that you don't know, that the gamesmaster hasn't told you yet. Well, a role-playing game functions very strongly on shared assumptions. The gamesmaster can't *possibly* tell you everything that there is to know that your character would know about the world, except to assume that it is going to be something like the real world except for a couple of deviations.

DARREL: *I also have a great many questions about Dr. Manhattan. When he first started revealing his powers in the series, it seemed to me like: here's a character who knows everything, he knows what's going to happen all down the line. But as the series has unfolded it seems to me that maybe that is not exactly the case, that there may be a misinterpretation of scope, and that he has his own limitations?*

DAN: Well, of course. While he can see the future, he can't change it. Except, yeah, he does say in issue #10 about how the future is actually kind of hazy, and who knows if he's saying that because it's true or because that is the thing that he said.

DARREL: *Right. That's the thing he knows he is supposed to say.*

DAN: So you get into a situation of a mirror reflecting a mirror reflecting a mirror reflecting a mirror reflecting a mirror — you don't know where it begins or ends.

DARREL: *With all of the other characters, though . . . that would seem to me to be a very difficult character to work in with the other characters in something like a role-playing game.*

DAN: Exactly. What I did in the game is that I made him a non-player character who deliberately doesn't care to get involved in the adventure, even though it means rescuing his pale Wally Weaver, because his motivations are completely inexplicable. Not completely, but they are known to him and they don't always make much sense to mere mortals. So the decision I made in the game — and Alan agreed it would be a good idea — would be to put him on the side as "available to play if the gamesmaster wants to take responsibility." And, in addition, because he can basically do anything — his list of powers is like half a column . . .

DARREL: *Right, and the other characters don't really have powers.*

DAN: Well, they do to some extent.

DARREL: *Well, yeah, Nite Owl has his machines and stuff, but there's nothing internal giving them power other than their own internal drive and desire.*

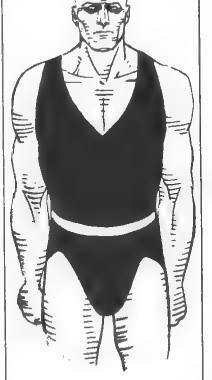
DAN: Exactly, they're basically Batman in analogue. But if somebody does run Dr. Manhattan, there's a rule in the DC HEROES system which is called "Limitations," and Dr. Manhattan has what is called "a catastrophic irrational attraction to knowledge of the physical world." He insists on acting basically out of a drive to gather more information, and not always by what we would perceive as normal human motivations. You know, he's not easily going to get angry if he sees something going on, so essentially he has to make a role to take action, to take effective action.

DARREL: *And yet there is still a human being underneath all of that.*

DAN: So basically *if* the gamesmaster thinks that a player is capable of playing that, and not just capable of playing it as just a powerhouse who would blow through the entire adventure, then okay.

DARREL: *Right. You don't want to blow the adventure by having one character solve everything.*

DAN: Although that would certainly be an interesting game experience for the players to have; the unnerving sense of what use is a mere mortal with somebody like Dr. Manhattan around — which was something that the world of WATCHMEN is grappling with. And so having that to consider for the course of the adventure, if that's what the players want, would *also* make for an interesting game. So the possibility is there if the gamesmaster and the players are up to it. They could do it and it could be a very exciting adventure. . .



DARREL: *Okay, the characters, some of them, in WATCHMEN, are very extreme. Dr. Manhattan is an extreme character in certain senses. The Comedian and Rorschach and Ozymandias are the other extreme characters. They are more extreme than you would ever want to find in real life.*

DAN: Right. They are not people that you would want to have over for dinner and to shoot the breeze with, with the possible exception of Nite Owl who is *just* a nice guy.

DARREL: *Yeah, Nite Owl and the other characters are more-or-less normal. Alan said he tried to create diverse characters, some of whom would be instantly well liked, and both the Nite Owls and both the Silk Spectres were included in that list. But the extreme characters, on the other*

"Rorschach has real human values . . .

hand. . . there's a question here, I just can't think of it.(Laughter.)

DAN: The characters *are* extreme. They are not standard comic-book characters with stock, standard comic-book problems. They are not a bunch of Peter Parkers running around feeling neurotic. They are extreme people with extreme feelings, and very *complex* feelings as well.

DARREL: *I've thought of a question! What benefit do you think a player would derive from playing a character that is that extreme?*

DAN: You might talk to the people who are playing it, because I understand it is selling quite well. I think there's a lot of fun there, and especially there is a really *interesting* experience there, in playing someone with the varying complexity of these characters. It's a real stretch for the players to try and play someone like Ozymandias. He's not just a guy with incredible smarts. He has such an enigmatic personality. He seems like an easy-going affable guy on the surface, but underneath there's an incredible intensity.

DARREL: *There's a real manipulative bastard there.*

DAN: And Rorschach, he's not quite demented at the time this adventure takes place, but there's still such an intensity to him and . . .

DARREL: *He's on the razor's edge to begin with?*

DAN: Exactly, and there's a lot of richness in that. Actually, one of the players of the adventure just walked into the room. *(Speaks to someone off microphone.)* You played Rorschach, what did you get out of playing it? *(Laughter.)* He said, "It made me feel good."

DARREL: *What did he get out of Rorschach?*

DAN: He said, "It made me feel good." *(Laughter.)* Please elaborate. Here he is.

HUGH CALDWELL: Yeah, I think Rorschach has, like, real human values, okay? I mean, most people think he's like sick and demented and insane, which he is, but on down deep he's actually a real nice guy. Have you read the WATCHMEN series?

DARREL: *Yes.*

HUGH: So you know the part where he's under the river with Nite Owl in the ship. That's, like, human interest, you know, with the stuff going on there. And, you know, he's sick and he does all of these very strange things, but he's well meaning with what he does.

DARREL: *What did you get out of the experience of being Rorschach?*

HUGH: Well, it certainly allows you to let loose with all of your psychopathic tendencies. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: Oh, great, that sounds wonderful.

DARREL: *But you keep it in the game?*

HUGH: Oh, yes, definitely. I'm not a psychopathic individual. And, too, you know, the good thing about Rorschach is that he's *very* cunning, and he's just basically an ordinary human. To play him well you have to think, you know, about how you are going to approach a situation. Mostly when you think about superheroes you think about all of these guys with all of these powers. You have people who are very powerful who just go in there and whale on each other. With WATCHMEN you can't do that. With Rorschach in particular, because he's basically just an ordinary person, you have to think about all of the situation you are going to get into before it gets to combat.

DAN: Did you get that?

DARREL: *Yeah, that was great.*

DAN: I think Hugh hit on something really important there, too, that there is a tendency in role-playing games not really to role play. There's a tendency to say, "All right, I'm playing, say, Spider-Man, but I'm going to basically have him react as I would in any situation. I'm not really going to play him."

DARREL: *Imagine yourself as the character?*

DAN: Right, exactly. I won't play him the way **Stan Lee** writes him, or the way he's intended to be. With WATCHMEN the characters are so strong and so . . .it's very *easy* to get a grasp on them. I mean . . .I think **Alan Moore** is a real writer. I think he writes literature. I don't think he's just a "comic-book writer." I think that his writing will be discovered eventually by the literary world, because it is literature. Really, a lot of people have said that about comic books, you know — Marvel comics are literature and all of that — but they're really not. I mean, they're formulaic escapist fun, but. . . .

DARREL: *You can find examples where they kind of stretch themselves out into various philosophies and things. They can be literature in that sense.*

DAN: Right, and there are literary devices in them; but in terms of a real piece of literature, you know, comic books really don't measure up yet, but they're getting there; and things like WATCHMEN do, because the characters have a *richness* and a *complexity* that really doesn't show up normally in a comic. So when the players are going to play them, yeah, sure, you

---

Investigation #1

Missing: Hollis Mason

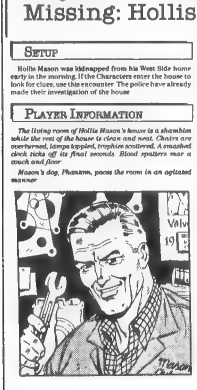
Setup

Hollis Mason was kidnapped from his West Side home early in the morning. If the Characters enter the house to look for clues, use this encounter. The police have already made their investigation of the house

Player Information

The living room of Hollis Mason's house is a shambles while the rest of the house is clean and neat. Chairs are overturned, lamps toppled, trophies scattered. A smashed clock ticks off its final seconds. Blood spatters mar a couch and floor

Mason's dog, Phantom, paces the room in an agitated manner



G-M Information

Player Characters successfully using Detective Skill vs. OV/RVs of 4/5 learn the following information

Mason's House

Info

1: The blood splatters are disconnected and are possibly from different sources.

2a: There are two types of blood on the floor, type A and type O

2b: Mason has type AB blood, so none of the blood is his

4: Mason's dog, Phantom, has blood residue encrusted on his muzzle. The blood is type O.

5+: Phantom begins to nose some scraps of black leather with flecks of orange paint on them. The leather is the sort used in leather jackets; the paint scraps are fabric paint.

From this information, the Players can conclude that Mason put up a struggle before being subdued and that at least two different assailants received wounds. They can also determine that one of the wounds is a dog-bite and may be severe. In addition, they may suspect that the bitten kidnapper wore a leather jacket.

Play now proceeds to either Encounter 2: *Conquering Notes* or another Investigation

Troubleshooting

The Characters may wish to use their Police Connections for more information but the police have uncovered little about the case

down deep he's actually a nice guy."

can play Rorschach as basically Batman with a full face mask and a trench coat — *or* you can actually get down to the nuts and bolts of the character, what makes him work, and *that* makes for a much more exciting role-playing experience because you are actually role playing. You're not just rolling dice at each other.

So, yeah, I think that that's the heart of it, that because the characters have such strong personalities — and it's not just that they're strong in the sense that they are intense, but they're strong in the sense that they're well defined, and they're cleanly crafted — and really, in the scope of the series, we know these characters better than . . . well, you know, how well do we really know Green Lantern's personality?

DARREL: *Well, it depends on which one you're talking about.*

DAN: Yeah, but so many comic-book characters are bland. They really are. There's no blandness in WATCHMEN.

DARREL: *There is one character in your game that we don't really know very well from the series — we do know him pretty well, but not as well as the other characters — which would be Captain Metropolis. From what I've seen, Alan has created Captain Metropolis as your standard superhero person, essentially as a story device. Would you care to elaborate on that*

DAN: Okay. Captain Metropolis is another one who is a suggested non-player character, for a couple of reasons. His powers don't *really* hold up with the others. He's got a good sense of the way he wants the world to be, but Silk Spectre could beat the snot out of him with very little difficulty. So for that reason and a couple of others, it's suggested that he's played as a non-player character.

But once again, just like Dr. Manhattan, if the gamesmaster and a player want to go ahead and play him there's a rich role-playing experience there, as well. You see, when I play role-playing games, and when many of my friends and people that I game with play, we're not out so much to "win" the adventure. A real satisfaction for us does come from how many bad guys our characters beat up, or how many ghosts we catch in GHOSTBUSTERS or monsters we kill in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, but that's very secondary to the *real* fun, which is the experience of playing the characters and the experience of interaction.

DARREL: *Winning in a role-playing game, in other words, is not getting the biggest number of the tally sheet, it's having the most fun that you personally can have?*

DAN: Right, and in that sense every game is a win. There's no "lose" in a role-playing game. You always come away from the experience — you know, as long as it's done well — really glad that you went in. It's not like the standard game where there's guaranteed winners and losers. It's a win/win game for the gamesmaster and for all of the players, and that's what's really exciting about it. It's taking the competition away, and once the competition is gone and everyone is working together — I mean, it's not even gamesmaster versus the players — they're all on the same side and they're all out for the same goal, which is to have a helluva game and have fun. When that happens the energy really picks up!

DARREL: *One more thing about your module — this is probably a moot point — but the players could take the module and probably create their own adventures?*

DAN: Absolutely, because the module has given them all of the stats on the characters, all their powers — and they have more than you would think. There's things such as "Escape Artist" and like that. And it also has a description of the personalities that I worked out based on what Alan Moore had said. That really pulls together a lot about the characters, and explains them in a way that I think gives you a really strong hold on how to play the characters. So, yeah, my WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN module *is* a point of departure for lots of other WATCHMEN games. Now, whether those games will fit into the regular chronology of WATCHMEN is a whole 'nother matter. You know, they may very well end up violating the finely crafted time-line of the characters. But still, the point to a role-playing game is to have fun. It's not the point to fit in with WATCH-

DANIEL GREENBERG

"I'm working on a STAR WARS game."

MEN — even though WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN does fit in, it does not violate the time-line at all.

DARREL: *One thing, when I talked with Alan, he was very adamant about the fact that the series is a thing whole in itself. There will be no sequel. But it occurs to me that for anybody who is really an intense WATCHMEN fan, they could buy the modules that come out and kind of create their own sequel.*

DAN: Exactly, or even play anywhere along the time-line, like "What If the Crimebusters Did Decide To Form?" Yeah, sure, it's outside the regular scope of the comic, but so what? Because, like you said, there are a lot of people who are *very* into WATCHMEN.

DARREL: *It's a shame, in a sense, that he's not going to continue, and on the other hand he wants it to stand as it is and not to be diluted by anything that might be done afterwards.*

DAN: Exactly, and it does stand alone very well. It's — you know, because I've know the ending since the beginning, I've seen what a finely *crafted* piece of work it is. It holds together very well. The whole book is thought out from beginning to end as one unit, as one experience, broken up into twelve different sections; and yeah, exactly, there is no way that they could in integrity add a sequel or add a, you know, "what happened in these months," because the thing holds together so well in and of itself. They may do a Minuteman book. Alan expressed interest in that way back.

DARREL: *He didn't mention anything like that to me.*

DAN: It's possible, then, that that may not even happen.

DARREL: *A friend of mine keeps saying, "Oh, they could do a whole series just filling in all of the gaps for us!"*

DAN: Yes, they could. But... well first of all they won't, and I think our imaginations can go a long way toward that, towards exactly what went on, because there's so much between the lines of WATCHMEN, there's so much to be inferred. You know, like whether the Comedian did kill **Kennedy.**

DARREL: *Or Hooded Justice, for that matter.*

DAN: No, no, it is pretty much implied in issue #11 that it was the Comedian.

DARREL: *Yeah, well...*

DAN: On orders from **Nixon,** no less, or someone in **Nixon's** cabal.

DARREL: *It's very well implied, but it's not clearly stated.*

DAN: Exactly, that's what I'm saying. That's just one example of reading between the lines. The parallel of the pirate story to the whole situation of WATCHMEN is striking.

DARREL: *And the pirate story... have you ever sat down and read it by itself?*

DAN: Yeah, I did. I mean, I've read each issue quite often, scoping out every single bit of detail. Yeah, and the pirate story itself hangs together beautifully, and the way it parrallels the story is absolutely masterful.

DARREL: *Do you have anything you would like to add in conclusion?*

DAN: I think WATCHMEN is doing tremendous things to legitimize the whole comic-book industry. Add to that DARK KNIGHT and a couple of other things that are going on now. I really think that WATCHMEN will be a piece of popular literature that will be pretty widely-accepted in the future. I think the reprint edition will do extremely well. It will be read by people who have never read comics. And I'm looking for a similar development in the role-playing line, some one project or just an overall trend that will spark the interest of the general public in role-playing games, because right now it's a very odd thing that a lot of people's kids do, but that's about the extent of it. And there's a lot available in role-playing games for everybody, for people who would like to harness their imagination, people who would like to be more creative. Role-playing is great for building communication skills, for interaction. I'm looking for a similar development in the gaming world. West End Games is producing a STAR WARS role-playing game.

DARREL: *Oh, that should draw a lot of interest!*

DAN: Yeah, exactly, and I'm working on that project now, doing the first adventure for it, and I think *that* has a lot of potential. It's going to be sold in Waldens and there will be a lot of material the general public would be interested in. You can read it completely outside of the gaming context and have it make sense, but it would also be a draw into the gaming world. So this is a very exciting time right now, for comics and for role-playing games.

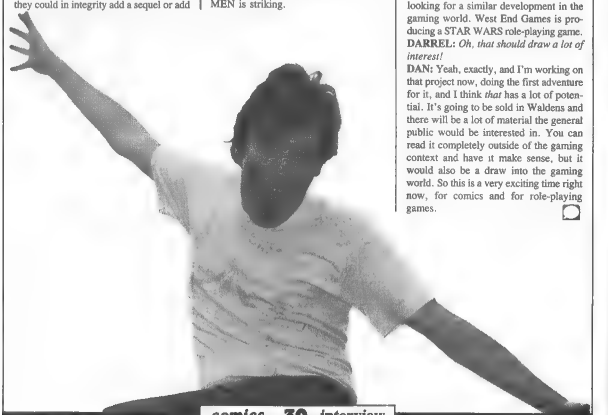


Photo By: Doug R. Ziegler

"I thought it would be an interesting idea to do a WATCHMEN adventure."

RAY WINNINGER

WHO WATCHES THE

Photo Ilka Scott

About WATCHMEN II — first off, the title is as yet undecided. The adventure was originally titled "The Harlot's Curse" but Ray thinks Mayfair will retitle it. The title comes from William Blake's poem "London," which is one of his SONGS OF EXPERIENCE. "The Harlot's Curse" refers to the way that London prostitutes would get venereal disease, become pregnant, and then give birth to deformed offspring. Winninger thought this was a great Watchmen-type image and decided to write his story around it. The poem, like the story, is about the transmission of evil and corruption. The story is about one of the key events that made the World of the Watchmen the evil, foul place that it is.

"I know all of this sounds rather heavy for a game module, but the one thing I was interested in accomplishing above everything else was to produce an accurate simulation of Alan and Dave's work in the game," says Ray. "I have taken great pains to recreate the mood and narrative technique of the WATCHMEN series (the poem resonates throughout the story, there are Rorschach's Journal passages, there is a recurring visual image, etc.) I sure hope everyone is happy with it."

In addition to the adventure, the completed package will contain a sort of mini-Watchmen Sourcebook. The Sourcebook which will contain a complete history of the Watchmen and their world, is co-credited to Alan Moore who spent a great deal of his time on the phone helping construct the history, inventing new details on the spot where necessary, and giving Ray the freedom to invent details of his own. Also in the sourcebook are complete statistics and descriptions for the Minutemen, the first generation of superheroes, and a couple of other little surprises. The Sourcebook should be of immense interest to Watchmen fans, including those who don't play the game . . .

DARREL BOATZ: *You're the writer of the second WATCHMEN role-playing module. How did you qualify for such a challenge?*

RAY WINNINGER: I hadn't read com-

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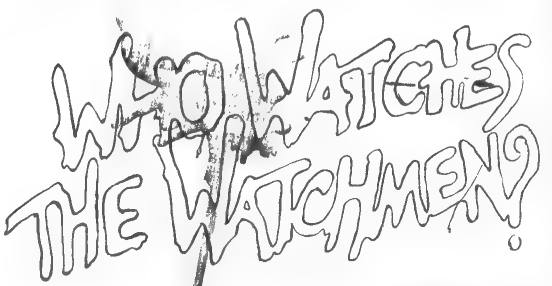
"I built the game around a Blake poem



ics until the role-playing games came about. Someone suggested that comics would be a good place to look for ideas for stories for the role-playing games, so I started reading comics and I learned to like those a lot. So I was really interested, of course, when Mayfair did their DC role-playing game, and I hooked up with them right away.

DARREL: *What was your reaction to comics when you first started reading them?*

RAY: Well, they sort of took me by surprise. The only exposure I had to the characters were the Saturday morning television shows, so the sophistication took me by surprise. The superhero titles somewhat — but *especially* the comics medium, itself — interested me a lot. I was mostly reading superhero titles to get ideas for stories for the role-playing games, but I went *past* that into some of the alternative comics. Some of them, the sophistication really surprised me.

DARREL: *How did you get involved with doing a WATCHMEN module?*

RAY: Well, I'd read the series from the first issue, of course. After I started writing heavily for Mayfair I've read heavily everything that DC publishes. I like the series a lot. When the first couple of issues of the series were out, I mentioned to the people at Mayfair that I thought it would be an interesting idea to do WATCHMEN adventure, but at the time no one seemed to think *that* was feasible. WATCHMEN is really a different topic compared to what the usual role-playing game stuff is like. So it pretty much faded from there.

I hadn't even thought about translating WATCHMEN to the game at all until I got a call in November of 1986 — you can figure out however many issues of the series were out — that someone had written a first one and they are looking for a second one and would I still be interested in doing one? I *jumped* at it right away, because I'm a big fan of the series.

DARREL: *Did you have an idea that you wanted to do, something specific, or just that you wanted to do WATCHMEN?*

RAY: Orginally, it was just that I wanted to do WATCHMEN. The first thing that we looked into was the possibility of doing a sequel to what Alan was doing in the series, and then we thought that that wouldn't be such a great idea. So we went back with the idea of setting the adventure, you know, as sort of like a prequel to the maxi-series. The way that I went about coming up with a topic for the adventure is: I listed on a piece of paper all of the things that came to my mind when I thought of WATCHMEN, all of the things like the strange politics in their world, all of the little images that I remembered from the comic books, and so forth.

And then I started looking at the narrative technique. The first thing I was always concerned with in this whole thing was preserving the integrity of the series. That's what I really wanted to do, more than anything else. I didn't want to write a SUPERMAN adventure and stick WATCHMEN into it or anything like that; I thought that would have been horrible. So I started looking into a lot of the types of literature that Alan was using for his quotes and that he was building the series

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ray Winninger ("g" as in Kissinger)
Born: 18 September 1966
Residence: Evanston, IL
Occupation: Student/Writer
Education: Studying toward BAs in English and Philosophy at Northwestern University.
Credits: DC HEROES adventures "Lights, Camera, Kobra" and whatever they decide to call Watchmen II (I like "Harlot's Curse") — others coming. "Countdown, Hartlewick Horror, The Cybermen," and "Gallifrey" for FASA. Numerous others.
Favorite Comics: LOVE AND ROCKETS, AMERICAN SPLENDOR, RAW, THE SPIRIT, THE WATCHMEN.
Favorite Comics Characters: Maggie and Hopey, Batman, The Shadow, Swamp Thing, Rorschach, The Spirit, Reuben Flagg, Superman, Harvey Pekar.

with prostitutes, v.d., deformed kids."

around. I came upon this **William Blake** poem called "London" which has this image about how the prostitues in London around the turn of the century would get venereal diseases and then their children would be born deformed and so forth — the poem is basically about how evil and corruption is spread.

I thought that was a great image for WATCHMEN, so I took the poem and I started building the story for the module around it. The poem resonates through the story in the module just like the TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER comic in the issues of WATCHMEN works. The module story is about how evil and corruption spread through the world of WATCHMEN, how it got to be such a bad place, and it focuses on one particular event in 1968 that contributed to the world of WATCHMEN becoming the way it is.

DARREL: *Since you said that, I'd like to get your interpretation of how did the world of WATCHMEN get the way it is.*

RAY: Well, that . . . *(Laughter.)* It can't really be clarified into one event, because everything that Alan is working with — or, at least, so it seemed to me — has a very *negative* tone to it, obviously. Everything is just loaded, you know, for this sort of atmosphere. But some of the key events for the world of WATCHMEN getting into the state it is in would be the arrival of the first superhero, Hooded Justice. Superheroes throughout the whole history just essentially turn out to be a negative influence.

Of course, the genesis of Dr. Manhattan, who essentially ruins the balance of power and destroys relations between the East and the West. Closely related is the election of **Nixon**, who uses Dr. Manhatton foolishly in a couple of instances. It's also alluded to in the series that Dr. Manhattan cures the energy crisis by making it possible to manufacture the elements necessary to make electric-powered cars and things like that. And this person of godlike proportions walking around the country, obviously in league with the President, would definitely have a negative effect on the morale of the people.

So the whole thing sort of snowballs into this state of affairs that we find the world in at the beginning of the maxi-series, the imminent nuclear war and so forth.

DARREL: *In creating your module did you have much contact with Alan Moore or other people at DC?*

RAY: Oh, yeah, quite a bit. I talked to Alan about general themes of WATCHMEN and so forth, and then after I started to get an idea I called him back, and we talked about the storyline and all of that. He filled me in on what was going to happen.

And in the module there is a complete history and time-line and everything of the world of WATCHMEN, all of the events in chronological order. He spent quite a bit of time on the phone with me clarifying all of this and making up new little details for me to put in there, and approving the things that I had made up for that. In the booklet, that's going to be credited to the two of us — the history section.

DARREL: *Can I take it that this module — even though it's not a sequel — has material in it that will be unfamiliar to me from having read the series?*

RAY: Most of it is background information. There's a lot of stuff about the Minutemen, who were the first generation of heroes in the series. Their histories and so forth. There's not room in the maxi-series to go into that, and Alan *had* created a lot of background on them, or a fair amount. That's all in the history.

DARREL: *I would take it, then, that from the material in the module we would learn a lot more about, let's see, Dollar Bill, Mothman, the Silhouette, people like that.*

RAY: Right.

DARREL: *Do you want to give any secrets away? (Laughter.)*

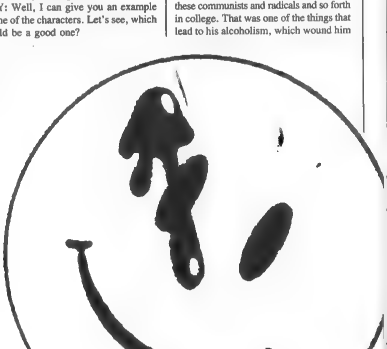
RAY: Well, I can give you an example of one of the characters. Let's see, which would be a good one?

DARREL: *Well, Mothman is still around, still alive, at the time of the series, so let's use him.*

RAY: Okay. The Mothman, his real name is Byron Lewis. He came from Connecticut. He was the son — I don't remember this exactly — but in any case, he's connected to a very wealthy family. In college, he was very idealistic. He hung around with the left-wingers and the radicals and so forth, and that's how he got the reputation for which, as shown in the series, he was censured by the Committee in 1955. While he was in college he hung around with these people, and his life-style he found extremely *boring*.

He was very guilty about the wealth he had. So he decided to become this superhero, when everyone was becoming superheroes. He created the costume and everything — he had a lot of money, he was sort of a Bruce Wayne type — and he went off and fought crime and joined the Minuteman. During World War II he was a conscientious objector, so he was assigned to a medical aid station in Europe. He spent the whole war there.

After he returned to the United States there was the big **McCarthy** period, where he was attacked for associating with these communists and radicals and so forth in college. That was one of the things that lead to his alcoholism, which wound him



A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM FRED & BIANCA

THIEVERY IS BEST LEFT TO TRAINED PROFESSIONALS! AMATEURS NOT ONLY LOWER THE LEVEL OF WORKMANSHIP, THEY COULD ALSO GET HURT!

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COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

"That led to his alcoholism . . ."

up in the rehabilitation center, which is where he is when the maxi-series starts.

DARREL: *Somewhere up in Maine?*

RAY: Right.

DARREL: *That's fascinating because, really, we don't get too much exposure to some of those characters from the Minutemen era in the series.*

RAY: Yes. They are great characters. I'd like to see stories just about the Minuteman. There's a lot of good stories there that Alan could tell.

DARREL: *You could even possibly come out with a module to deal with that era. Dan Greenberg who did the first adventure, tried to recreate the mood and the flavor of the series with kidnappings, a mysterious foe, and another mystery going on at the same time. It sounds like you're taking another tack, you're recreating that mood and flavor in a different way?*

RAY: Right. I think I can see why Dan set up his adventure like that. The mood and flavor of the comic comes through in my adventure mostly through narratives and themes and things like that. The narrative of the series is very closely copied in the module. There are Rorschach's Journal passages, and there's a neat little recurring visual image that's all tied up with the end, and all those sorts of things. And the themes are also very similar to those in the series. There are all sorts of ironies in the module that the players encounter.

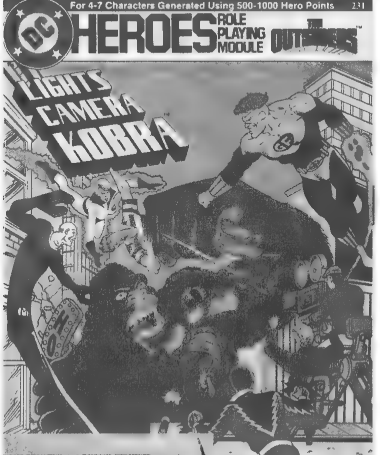
The idea that I was working on, the *main* villains that the characters are fighting — or at least the villains on one level that the characters are fighting — are obvious from the beginning. Along the way they discover that there's more to it than that, which there always is in the world of WATCHMEN, apparently, and they meet one of their old foes again in the adventure. And there's also sort of a strange *political* theme that they have to deal with, too. My adventure is set at the 1968 Republican Convention.

DARREL: *Chicago and the demonstrations?*

RAY: That's the Democrats.

DARREL: *That's the Democrats, right — I knew that. Let's see, Republicans . . .*

RAY: That was in Miami Beach, but it's explained in the module that it had to be moved to New York in the WATCHMEN world because of some problems down in Miami. I *was* definitely playing on the '68 Democratic Convention thing, though. I figured if I strung enough of these images from the '60s into this, it'll give it this sort of flavor that I want. You know, I want a '60s type feeling, but I also want this



grim WATCHMEN feeling, so I thought about what was grim about the '60s — the protests at the convention and so forth.

DARREL: *And with your adventure we'll be dealing with pretty much the same characters as in Dan's, the Crimebuster characters?*

RAY: Right, except Captain Metropolis.

DARREL: *Oh, has he retired?*

RAY: No, he hasn't actually retired, but I figured if Dan's adventure were to be considered as actually having happened, none of the other characters would really want to have anything to do with Captain Metropolis anymore. He doesn't retire as a hero, I don't believe — although I'd have to check the history to make sure — but he's killed in a car accident in the '70s, I think in '74.

DARREL: *So we have all of the characters except for the Captain, who is a suggested non-player character in the first module to begin with. In Dan's module, Dr. Manhattan is also suggested as a non-player character. Is he in yours as well?*

RAY: Yeah, he is also a non-player character in my module. He makes an appearance and makes this dramatic little WATCHMEN-type speech. He doesn't serve a very important role in the plot or anything, but I thought it just wouldn't be WATCHMEN unless you had Dr. Manhattan in there somewhere. So he appears in one scene. He doesn't actually help the players solve the crime or anything like that, but he does present reasons why he can't do that.

DARREL: *Since politics is a theme that you're using in your module, what do you see as the politics of the series?*

RAY: Well, the politics lying behind the WATCHMEN series seems to me to be the idea of absolute corruption. Nixon wants all of the power and will do anything he can to get it, in the series. It's *hinted*

"Superheroes are important to Nixon."

at in the series — and this is dealt with a little bit more in the module — that the Comedian was a pawn of **Nixon's,** or an employee of **Nixon's,** in the mid-'60s, and he was performing assassinations and so forth in order to get **Nixon** elected.

And **Nixon's** manipulation of Dr. Manhattan and so forth is just, you know, to further his image and to get people elected. **Nixon** is a very manipulative sort in the series, and in the series itself he doesn't appear to have any sort of political challenger, which is also interesting. He's pretty much on his own there. The Russians in the series don't appear, in the wake of Dr. Manhattan, to have much power.

DARREL: *I've always seen the series more as a cause-and-effect type of situation — you know, the superheroes being a cause, and the world taking off in a direction other than our world did, being an effect.*

RAY: Right. It *is* a cause-and-effect type of relationship, I think, too. Notice how important the superheroes are to **Nixon** in his politics. The Comedian is one of the people responsible for his ever being elected. Alan throws some nice hints around with the Comedian in there. He never really comes out and says that the Comedian was the one who killed **Kennedy,** who murdered **Woodward** and **Bernstein** after they discovered the Watergate cover-up and everything, but he hints at it very strongly. It *is* definite that the Comedian did have some involvement with **Nixon,** and did perform a lot of illegal things for **Nixon,** and this is picked up on in the adventure. And later on Dr. Manhattan is **Nixon's** good friend. **Nixon** promises the people victory in Vietnam within a year or two and with Dr. Manhattan he can give that to them. And he promises them lower energy costs and everything, and with Dr. Manhattan he can give *that* to them.

DARREL: *Could someone take the module that you've created and develop their own adventures based on it?*

RAY: I think so and I hope so. At a couple of points in the adventure, such as the Dr. Manhattan description, I hint how they could be used in other adventures. And there's going to be a center section to my module, which is a pullout that essentially is going to be a miniature WATCHMEN sourcebook. That's going to have the history section in it, the history that I did with Alan, and the character statistics and so forth for the Minuteman, and a couple of other little things. The history section should suggest a number of adventures that you could do, and with the statistics in the sourcebook you now have the statistics for all of the heroes in WATCHMEN, and most of the important statistics.

DARREL: *Could be worth buying just for the sourcebook!*

RAY: Oh, yeah. You could do a lot with it, I think. You could even do Minuteman adventures, if you wanted to.

DARREL: *The chronology would be that detailed, to where you could go back to the '40s and kind of fill in the gaps?*

Above: Limited run of WATCHMEN buttons. Below: Captain Metropolis, from the first WATCHMEN game.

Role-Playing Metropolis and Manhattan

Captain Metropolis and Dr Manhattan are Non Player Characters in this adventure for very deliberate reasons. Captain Metropolis is the mastermind behind the plot the heroes are trying to unravel and Dr Manhattan has such non-human motivations that playing him would be difficult for even the most skilled role player. Still, they are both heroes in the Watchmen series and if the GM truly wishes to include them as Player Characters, it is the GM's adventure. The following are some guidelines for playing Metropolis and Manhattan.

Captain Metropolis

If there are more than five Players and the GM feels he/she can really trust one, that Player could accept Captain Metropolis. The Player would have to be in on the plot and be willing to follow the set script of the adventure. The Character would be more a "played" Non Player Character than a standard Player Character and would have to expect some degree of diminishment from the other Characters at the end of the adventure. So the Player should not strive for the same sort of attachment to Metropolis as he or she would for a normal Character

The advantage to having Captain Metropolis actually run by a Player instead of the GM is that the other Players will be less likely to suspect that Metropolis organized the said happings. It is possible they will be suspicious of Captain Metropolis just because he is a Non Player Character

The GM should only have a Player control Metropolis if the Player likes the idea and if there is time before the game to fill him or her in sufficiently on the plot.

Since Metropolis' Character kills Mole Varrows as part of the adventure, the Player should realize role played Metropolis will not receive a Standard Award at the adventure's completion.

Dr. Manhattan

This adventure is intended to be played without Dr Manhattan as his appearance can alter the play of the game substantially. But with some care, he could conceivably be run by one of the Players. Since Dr. Manhattan sees the future and the past, he knows of Captain Metropolis' plot

"Their world is not too far from our own."

RAY: The chronology goes year by year of what everyone was doing. The statistics are all there for the Minuteman, and in the history section it discusses a couple of the adventures that the Minuteman had, so you could see the sort of things that they were doing. The ones in the United States, for instance — the ones who weren't drafted into the Army — were fighting saboteurs and so on.

DARREL: *What benefits do you feel people could obtain from playing the characters in WATCHMEN?*

RAY: Well, one of the things I think Alan was certainly trying to do with characters like Rorschach and the Comedian and like that was *horrify* to some extent, especially with the Comedian. He's a very horrifying figure. *I* was horrified by the Comedian. *(Laughter.)* And by Rorschach and a few of the other characters like that. By actually forcing players to try to *think* like these people in certain situations, and do what they would do, it makes that impact much stronger — impact from the series. One of the players is going to see just how horrible the Comedian is — because he's going to have to *be* the Comedian and do what the Comedian would do

Rorschach isn't quite the character he is in the maxi-series, this being in the past, but he's really leaning that way. And necessarily I think *one* of the points Alan was trying to make through the series was the price of hope. Is there room for hope in such a world and, if so, what does it cost? You know, with . . . well, actually . . . this interview is going to come out after the series?

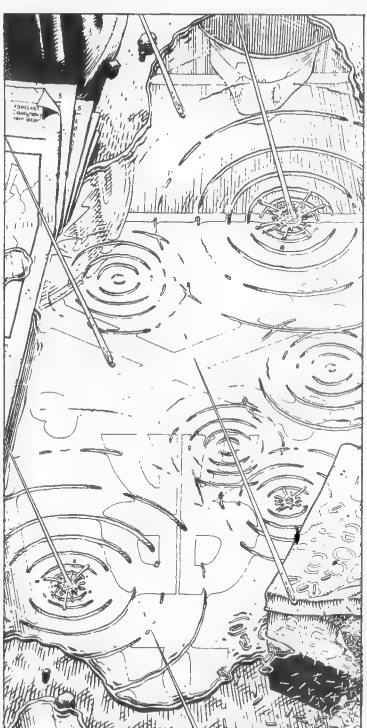
DARREL: *It will be coming out about the same time as your module is scheduled to be released.*

RAY: Ozymandias's ultimate dilemma there, then, killing a few people as opposed to letting everyone die — you know about that?

DARREL: *It's better to kill half the world than to let the whole world go up in smoke.*

RAY: Right. The adventure is a little different than that. I told you it was about how the world of WATCHMEN got to be such a miserable place and so forth, so there isn't exactly a *lot* of room for hope in the adventure. In fact, one of the ideals behind it is, even if the players win, they lose, really. But I think, through playing this, and playing the roles of these characters, the impact of the series will become much stronger. You might be able to pick up on a lot of Alan's points from the series.

DARREL: *So there is an experience there, through the game, that could be valuable to them? In what way?*



Especially keen readers will note the presence of Rorschach in this cover of WATCHMEN #5.

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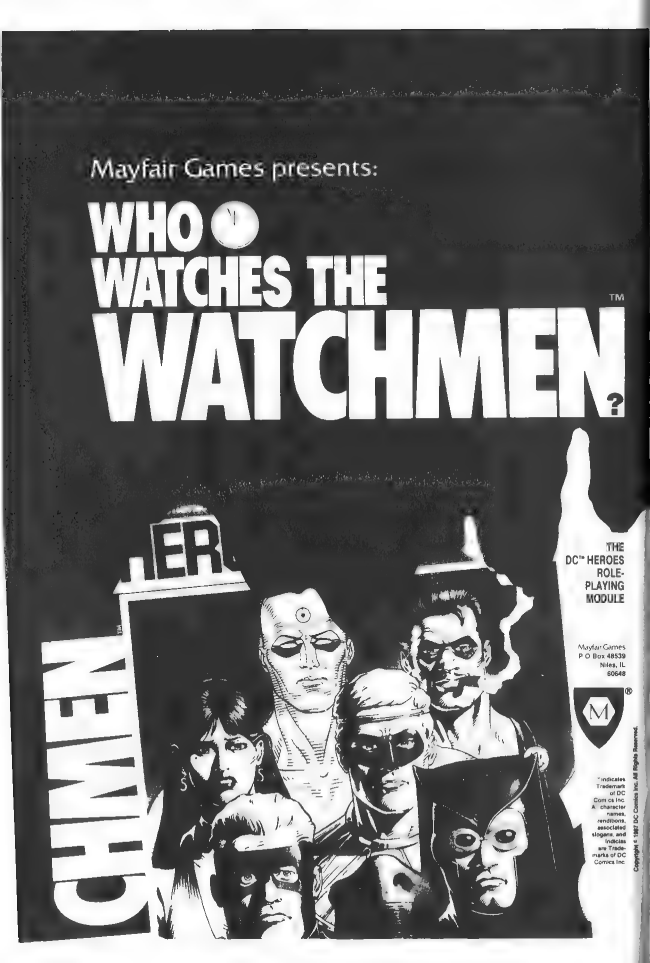

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RAY WINNINGER

"What — give Alan Moore a call?"

RAY: I suppose just one of the things that they're brought into contact with is just how powerful things can be that they have to deal with. That sounds really stupid, but even with all of their super powers and their super equipment and everything, in the module none of that's of any use to them in the end, really. They realize that it's just a personal struggle, something like this.

DARREL: *In doing that, though, how do you think the players will be able to relate the experience they receive to the actual real world in which we all live?*

RAY: I suppose by *looking* at things in a different way and seeing just what everyone *could* be up against in such a world...

DARREL: *In other words, they can gather a new perspective of our world through the WATCHMEN world?*

RAY: Oh, I think they definitely can. I think that's part of the point to the whole WATCHMEN series, and I think that the module will help that a lot. The WATCHMEN world is very grim and very dark and so forth, but it's really on several points not too far drawn away from our own. It *exaggerates* some of these things, but I think it also sort of cautions people in certain areas like politics and leadership and all of those little things, on just the pursuit of power.

DARREL: *There's so much in the series.*

RAY: Yeah, it really is amazing. The detail that they've planned out in the entire series, it's just very, very tight planning. There are things that bounce from, like, the first issue to the last issue.

DARREL: *When you read the first issue, there are things that you're not going to get until after you've read, say, issue #5. The ways the events kind of all string together, your perception of it alters.*

RAY: And that's very important toward creating the cause-and-effect atmosphere you were talking about before, because after you get his idea you can *see* how interwoven all of the events are in the frame of the series, how interlocked everything is, and the causes and effects become much more believeable.

DARREL: *Like the meeting where the Crimebusters failed to become a group — it takes an even more significance towards the end of the series than it seems to have at first.*

RAY: Right. My favorite panel in the entire thing — there's basically a panel that gives away the entire mystery — is after Comedian burns the map and walks out, the panel has Captain Metropolis saying someone has to save the world, while Ozymandias intently studies the little map.

DARREL: *That's half burned. Yes, that's really the focal point for the whole series, but you don't realize it at the time.*

RAY: Right.

DARREL: *What did you get out of the experience of creating this module?*

RAY: I had more fun working on this than anything I had ever worked on before, just because I had an opportunity to do a lot more with this than I have in the past with a game module. I got to put artistic themes and so forth in it and do that sort of thing. I really got into the writing, the Rorschach's Journal passages and things like that. And also it was really interesting working with Alan and talking to him. That was a big kick for me, because I've always really liked his stuff a lot. Ever since he took over on SWAMP THING, I've been one of his big fans.

DARREL: *He's amazingly easy to deal with. He made it very easy for me to talk with him.*

RAY: Yeah. I was *extremely* nervous the first time I talked to him. We were talking about doing this WATCHMEN thing and they told me I should give **Alan Moore** a call and see if he'd help us out with it, and I thought, "What do you mean, give **Alan Moore** a call?" I thought he was the last person in the world that would have time to help us out. A couple of our phone conversations went on quite awhile and he went into serious detail about everything. It was really fun.

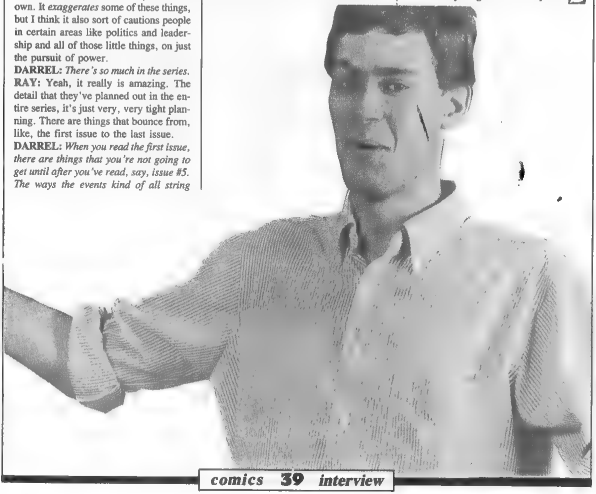

Photo: Ike Scott

"...AMAZING HEROES had grown disen-

R.A. JONES

After the regulation decade of being too old for such foolishness, I'd just started buying comics again when I met R.A. Jones. Each week, when I'd belly up to the counter at the late and lamented Aardvark Comics and Sci-Fi with a handful of guilty pleasures camouflaged by the snooty titles stacked on top, the guy would be there — talking, joking, recommending books to people. That's the kind of place Aardvark was, a den of esoterica you could pitch a tent in as far as management was concerned, so long as the talk remained interesting — and it's characteristic of R.A. Jones that that's where he chose to hang out.

He'd been the regular comics reviewer for Fantagraphics' magazine AMAZING HEROES, as well as a steady contributor of articles and hero histories, and this twice-monthly exposure had made him something of a celebrity to many of the shop's younger customers. Considering the intense self-importance evidenced by the many members of the "fan press," I was impressed by R.A.'s refusal to take himself too seriously. In our occasional conversations since, I've found him to be unfailingly pleasant, even when stating fervently-held opinions, as you'll see in the following pages.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: R.A. Jones
Occupation: Writer
Born: 1953
Residence: Tulsa, Oklahoma
Education: Associates Degree, Journalism. Bachelor's Degree, History.
Most Embarrassing Accomplishment: Author of the Hero History of Ultra, the Multi-Alien.
Favorite Comics: What, and blow a whole column?
Pet Peeve: Baxter paper.
Favorite Quote: "Immature artists imitate, mature artists steal."

JAMES VANCE: *Okay, let's take off the gloves right from the start. What does the "R.A." stand for?*

R.A. JONES: *(Laugher.)* Robert Allen. Robert Jones is such a bland name, and I didn't want to use a pseudonym, so I went with the initials.

JAMES: *After a three-year stint as the writer of the "Comics in Review" column in AMAZING HEROES — during which*

chanted and...well, I called and resigned."

© 1986 World Publishing Co.

Rollickin' R.A. ready to make the leap from reviewer to reviewee.

"I'll be continuing to do at least some of

AND IN A NEARBY CORRIDOR...
GORDY, M'MAN, YOU HAVE HIT THE MOTHER LODE THIS TIME! A THOUSAND BUCKS A NIGHT--
JUST TO PROTECT OLD MAN LEOPOLD FROM FAIRY TALES!

Nightwolf, by critic-turned-writer R.A. Jones and Butch Burcham

time you'd been named favorite writer about comics in the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE poll, you'd seen DC running full-page recaps of your columns as advertisements, conventions had begun seeking you out for their guest lists -- with all that going for you, one day you called the AMAZING HEROES offices and turned in your resignation. Do you want to tell us why?

R.A.: Well... yes, I did call them up and resign, and yes, other people are going to do reviews for them, but... *(Laugher.)* This is kind of a long story. For a while leading up to that, it had seemed to me that the powers-that-be at AMAZING HEROES had grown increasingly disenchanted with me as their reviewer, and I thought it might be a good time to relieve them of the onus of having me around every issue. *(Laugher.)* I'd been offered a job as executive editor for Elite Comics, which was an opportunity I knew I shouldn't pass up -- but I'd also been concerned that that wouldn't leave me time to do that lengthy column every two weeks. So I finally decided to make the break and move on to what I hoped would be bigger and better things.

JAMES: *I guess there would also have been the problem of a conflict of interest...*

R.A.: I was afraid that *other* people would perceive there to be one, and hassle AMAZING HEROES or Elite, and there was no need for that. The same holds true now that we have taken Nightwolf (renamed DARK WOLF) and moved over to Malibu. My opinions on comics don't reflect the thoughts of anyone for whom I might work in another capacity. Many people have stated that they respect my opinions, even if they violently disagree with them. I pride myself on being as honest as I can be when reviewing a work, and I hope that is the kind of reputation I carry with me. Consequently, no one has accused me of having a conflict of interest. It could be argued that I should give up reviewing comics altogether now that I have entered the other side of the business, and that may be so. But I genuinely enjoy writing reviews; they make me feel like I'm in close contact with the other fans. So I continue to do them, including an occasional piece for my old alma mater, AMAZING HEROES. I am also now writing a general opinion column for the new weekly fan magazine, COMICS WEEK.

JAMES: *How much influence do you think a comics reviewer really has?*

R.A.: I think at most we probably make a difference of a few sales, one way or the other. I would like to think that even the people who disagree with my opinions would say that I at least have a well-thought-out reason for expressing them. I've read the majority of the books that have been published over the last twenty years, and I think that constant exposure has given me a certain perspective. I never just do a blanket "this is bad, this is good" kind of review. I try to give reasons for what I think, rather than "pronouncements from R.A. Jones." Beyond "influence," though, I hope the column is entertaining. I think it is; I think people simply enjoy reading the reviews I write, whether they agree with them or not.

JAMES: *What's the first comic you remember reading?*

the reviews in AMAZING HEROES."

R.A.: Oh, gosh . . .I don't remember a specific comic. When I say twenty years, I'm talking about being a serious fan. I was an avid reader, of everything, long before that. I remember until I was . . .oh, twelve . . .I read generally whatever was brought into the house, whatever my brother or sister would pick up. I can remember being impressed with the Dell comics from the late '50s, early '60s, because you always seemed to get more out of those books. The story continued right on to the inside and outside back cover. Of course, I read the DC comics from the early '60s, that everyone except me seems to be so nostalgic for nowadays. But they were simply one other type of reading that I was doing. There was no special love for them over any other type of literature.

JAMES: *So it was Stan Lee who made you catch fire?*

R.A.: Exactly. And to this day, I don't know what drew me to the particular book. It's the one that marks my beginning as a collector. I happened to have some loose change and I was in a drugstore, and spotted the cover of AVENGERS #17, the first issue with what was then the first new team of Avengers. It just reached out and grabbed me. **Stan Lee** had the facility to create magic for young people, and it worked on me. I began to collect the other Marvel titles then, and went back and picked up the back issues, and not only was I hooked on them, but after a short time I realized that this was what I wanted to do, too. I wanted to have this effect on people — to reach out and grab them the way **Stan Lee** had grabbed me. It was from that that my desire to be a writer grew. And I never had any other ambition. It's stayed with me to this day.

JAMES: *Back when the "Silver Age" was just getting into gear, there was no such thing as professional comics journalism, no way someone like yourself could make a living writing about comics. Were you involved in organized fandom back then?*

R.A.: Not at all. The first idea I had that there *was* such a thing was after **Roy Thomas** got into the business as a professional, and would make reference to his friend **Jerry Bails** and their fanzine ALTER EGO. And even after that, it really wasn't very important to me. I quite frankly barely had the funds to get the comics I wanted, so I didn't have anything left over to spend on fan publications. And I really wasn't aware of where they were, how to get them. You just didn't have the network of information that you have now.

JAMES: *So how did you get involved with AMAZING HEROES?*

Scimidar, by R.A. and Mike Roberts

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"It really hit me when I was told this."

R.A.: When the first direct-sales shop opened here in town, it was the first time I'd seen many fanzines, and I just happened to buy the first issue of AMAZING HEROES. At that point, my only intention was to pick up one more book that I'd be interested in reading. A short time afterwards, though, I realized that I had accumulated a large enough collection and a large enough body of knowledge that I thought I could make a contribution to the magazine, and use that, hopefully, as a starting point to get into the comics business as a professional. They accepted the first thing I sent them, and they've accepted almost everything since then.

JAMES: *So here you are today, another overnight success.*

R.A.: *(Laughter.)* Right. I'd been trying to break into print, mostly without success, for about seven years, and since I first made that determination to be a writer, it's been about twenty years. So I'm definitely another overnight success.

JAMES: *How many comics would you say you've reviewed since you started the column?*

R.A.: I'd estimate it in the neighborhood of 300. I like writing reviews; if a person really could make a good living at it, I'd be tempted to do a lot more of that. Actually, although I'm partially phased out of AMAZING HEROES, I'm still probably going to be doing a good deal of that. I've recently taken on a new column for MILE HIGH FUTURES, which **Mark Waid** had to vacate when he became the new AMAZING HEROES editor.

JAMES: *Do you bring any particular criteria to bear when you're reviewing a title?*

R.A.: I think I look at it the same way you would if you were judging any other type of book — or motion picture, for that matter. Story is of prime importance to me. I think good dialogue and characterization are the strongest thing the scripter brings to a comic book. Of course, you can't divorce artists from writers nowadays, and I've become even more convinced of that since I've started writing and editing comics myself. The way comics are done now, with more and more of them written in "Marvel style," it's very important that you have an artist who knows how to tell a story himself, how to pace it, how to lay it out.

JAMES: *What comics are you writing?*

R.A.: **Butch Burcham** and I are currently working on the DARK WOLF series for Malibu, the first issue of which has already appeared. I have also verbally committed to writing two other series for them. The first, also with Butch, is an adventure series titled THE FIST OF GOD. The second is a superheroine strip entitled SCIMIDAR. If there was every any doubt, I'm seeing now just how collaborative comics can be. Finding that middle ground where each contributor has the creative freedom they need is tough, but it's essential. Working with an artist — in the case of both these projects, Butch — has made me even more aware of that, not only as a scripter, but as a reviewer.

JAMES: *Of course, as a writer, you're now going to be subject to the opinions of other reviewers. How do you feel about that?*

R.A.: *(Laugher.)* I'm kind of looking forward to it. I've spent three years dishing it out, and I'd like to see if I can take it now. Well, seriously, no one enjoys unfavorable criticism, but if you're going to be in this type of business, you're going to have to learn to deal with that.

JAMES: *To your knowledge, have you ever had a negative influence directly upon someone whose work you reviewed unfavorably?*

R.A.: Yes. It was an independent comic I reviewed — I'm not going to mention the title or the creator, because I don't want to add insult to injury — but I didn't care much for it, and I wrote a negative review. It was largely directed at a single person, since he was both writer and artist, and sometime later, I met a friend of this person at a convention and they told me that this negative review had such an impact upon the creator that he went creatively blank. He was unable to work for two weeks. It really hit me when I was told this. I thought, "Oh, God. . .I hate that something I've written has had that kind of impact on someone." But by the same token, it's like I was just saying: if you're going to be in front of the public, you've got to develop a thick skin, as thick as you can, and realize that even the most popular of creative people get their share of criticism. I've certainly gotten my share, just as a reviewer. Frankly, I was more surprised than anyone at my winning the CBG poll a couple of years back, because if you read the letter column in

TO A SENSITIVE SUCH AS SCIMIDAR, A SINGLE TOUCH IS ENOUGH TO FLOOD HER SOUL WITH THE PSYCHIC EMANATIONS COMING FROM THE SYRINGE.
SHE CRIES OUT AS WAVES OF SENSATION POUND AGAINST HER SKULL. SHE SEES LIGHT, COLOR... A MULTITUDE OF PSYCHEDELIC IMPULSES, AND ULTIMATELY--
A GREAT NOTHINGNESS.

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"Gary Groth sometimes goes too far."

©1979 Jack Jackson

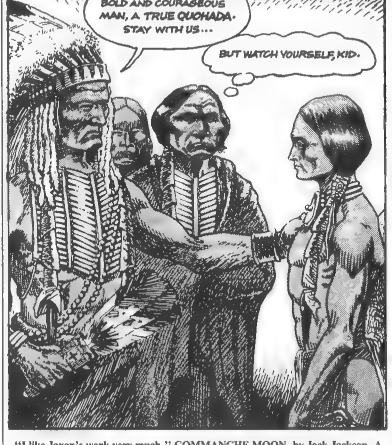
AMAZING HEROES, I would say that of those who've commented on me and my reviews, the criticisms of me probably outnumber the praise a good two to one. Which is fine, too, because at least I always knew people were reading it. You always have this fear that you're going to put something out there — a review column, a comic book, whatever — and no one's going to look at it. You learn to accept the criticism, because that's more than made up for when you have the nice experience of having someone write to you personally and tell you that your column is their favorite part of the magazine, or that they wish you would review even more books each issue, or come up and ask you for an autograph. That's a good feeling that, to me, far outweighs any criticism you could get from anyone.

JAMES: *I've noticed that from time to time, creators or readers who object to one of your reviews have asserted that you're just parroting Gary Groth.* Are *there house rules at Fantagraphics? Are any subjects or persons off-limits, or designated as the objects of praise or censure?*

R.A.: No. The editors I have worked for, and **Kim Thompson**, have never tried to influence what I write. I've written reviews that obviously my bosses didn't agree with, but they've never tried to censor me. When they've done special theme issues, like the all-Superman issue, for instance, they've asked me to review titles in keeping with that theme, and that certainly isn't an unreasonable request. . .But the implication that I'm not expressing my own opinion bothers me. I can understand a person's sensitivity if they've been, in their opinion, unjustly attacked by THE JOURNAL or anyone else. And I know that it hurts to put your heart and soul into something and then have someone say it's not good. That's one of the things that I *don't* like about reviewing. So I try to restrict my negative comments to the work, and not the person. It's simply a criticism of what they put on paper and present to the public. And to get back to your question, it's *my* criticism, no one else's.

JAMES: *What was the in-house reaction to your review of the Fantagraphics line in AMAZING HEROES?*

R.A.: There was actually *no* reaction, as far as what was communicated to me. They asked me to review all Fantagraphics books as part of the issue spotlighting Fantagraphics, and they told me going in that I probably wouldn't like most of the books that I'd be reviewing. I've heard that **Gary Groth** was not happy with it, and understandably so; but at the same time, I've got to give Gary his due. He did not edit out a single word of what I had to say about his books or him personally.



"I like Jaxon's work very much." COMMANCHE MOON, **by Jack Jackson. A monumental work, brought to you by Rip Off Press, Inc. & Last Gasp.**

JAMES: *You fairly raked him over the coals at one point.*

R.A.: Actually, with that piece, I think I fell down on my job as a communicator. What I intended to say was a lot less harsh than I've heard a lot of people say about him. Of course, it's got to hurt more having one of your own employees say those things about you. But Gary's never done anything to me personally. All I meant to say was, that in his zeal to divert comics from their headlong rush towards the oblivion of nothing but super-hero books, Gary sometimes goes too far, and in my opinion doesn't always exercise the best judgement. He has a good and viable position, which is, "Let's break away from the homogeneous super-hero blandness that's out there." But sometimes I think he goes blindly off in the other direction. "If Spider-Man is bad, then of necessity anti-Spider-Man must be good" — when, in truth, anti-Spider-Man *must* only be different, and different is not always better.

JAMES: *But you didn't catch any flak from that review?*

R.A.: No — at least, not from anyone connected with the magazine at the time the column was written. Shorty thereafter, a new editor came on board, and in the first letter he wrote to me, he let me know that he did not appreciate it. This was when that "disenchantment" I referred to earlier really came into focus. But they'd asked me to do it. I didn't just sit down and say, "Hey, I'm going to rake Gary and the rest of the gang over the coals today."

JAMES: *And as you said, they knew in advance what your review was likely to say.*

"Owsley found SWAMP THING objectionable."

R.A.: You know, that's something I'm becoming more and more aware of, as I go to conventions: how many people think they know what my opinions are going to be. I was talking with Gary once, and I mentioned in passing that he'd never sent me a review copy of **Jack Jackson's** LOS TEJANOS, and he dismissed it with, "You wouldn't like it, anyway." He seemed rather surprised when I informed him that I like **Jaxon's** work very much.

JAMES: *LOS TEJANOS is a good one.*

R.A.: I'll have to take your word for it. *(Laugher.)* Even close friends of mine will inform me that some book or other is something I wouldn't like. I guess it's because in my columns I do tend to be more mainstream than the editorial folk at Fantagraphics, but I don't think I'm as mainstream as I'm perceived to be. Look at my Top Ten for the last year: fully half of them have nothing whatsoever to do with costumed super-heroes in any form, and those that do, I think, represent the more outstanding efforts in that genre.

JAMES: *I don't want to put words in your mouth... and stop me if I do... but it seems to be that the mainstream, by virtue of* being *the mainstream, makes up the majority of what's out there, and you have to deal with that fact when you're choosing what to review.*

R.A.: Exactly. And even in the mainstream books — and "mainstream," to me, is basically just Marvel and DC. Even with them, you have a wider diversity than in the past. The same company that gave us BOOSTER GOLD also gave us THE WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT. The same company that gives us SPITFIRE AND THE TROUBLESHOOTERS is also giving us MOONSHADOW. Look, I think — and I've said this in my column any number of times — that even if you *prefer* to remain firmly entrenched in the mainstream, I think you're doing yourself a disservice if you don't at least sample what else is out there.

JAMES: *I want to touch a nerve here. We continue to hear a lot of talk about censoring language, or subject matter, or what have you, from the comics. I remember you told me once that at the Chicago Comicon you heard an interesting statement attributed to Jim Shooter...*

R.A.: Oh, yes. That was a couple of years ago, actually.

JAMES: *Oh, it's old news, then?*

R.A.: No, I think it still applies. I do have to say it wasn't **Shooter** who made the statement, but it was obvious that he thought in a similar vein. It was a panel discussion at which several writers were present, and the subject of the Comics Code and censorship came up. It was actually **Tom DeFalco** who made the statement that he believed that there should be *stronger* controls over what is allowed in comics, and I told a friend that it was lucky for everyone's dignity that I happened to be seated at the back of the auditorium when he said that, or I might have caused a ruckus.

JAMES: *Was he referring only to the alternatives, or was he talking about Marvel, itself?*

R.A.: He simply made a blanket statement. I can only assume he felt that this should apply industrywide. **Jim Owsley** was also on the same panel, and echoed those sentiments. In fact, he made the comment — Marvel had been making a great deal of references to SWAMP THING during the course of the convention — **Jim Owsley** made the comment that he read the book, liked the writing, but found the book objectionable. Apparently, the big gripe — and that is something **Jim Shooter** did say on another panel — they objected to the fact that the Comics Code seal had just been removed from it, and yet it still remained a newsstand book. Their contention was that the average comics fan out there cannot differentiate between SWAMP THING and SUPERMAN, SPIDER-MAN, or the other books that are still under the Code, that parents are going to see this book, say this is objectionable, assume that all other comics are the same type, and cause a flap. To which I say, so what? Let 'em! That's another thing that disturbed me about Marvel's attitude. They wanted — they want — to avoid any kind of government

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"Marvel can say unequivocally that Kirby

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intervention, a repeat of the Senate investigations of the '50s, this sort of thing . . . and to me it just reflected the attitude, "We're not fighting right now, but if we go ahead and surrender, we can prevent a war." Which is a very disturbing attitude — "Let's not make waves" — which is particularly disturbing coming from Marvel, when you consider that it was Marvel that first shook up the whole business. It was Marvel that first ran a comic in recent memory on the newsstands without a Comics Code seal, because they wanted to deal with a subject the Code wasn't comfortable with.

JAMES: *The SPIDER-MAN drug issues.*

R.A.: Exactly. To me, it shows an incredible lack of artistic and creative integrity on the part of Marvel.

JAMES: *There was also something Steve Englehart had written that Marvel objected to in THE VISION AND THE SCARLET WITCH . . .*

R.A.: That was at the same convention, but I think it bears repeating. Again, it was Tom DeFalco who had the objection. The Scarlet Witch had made what was referred to as an "obscene gesture" to a government agent. The way it was said, I really couldn't tell if the objection was to the gesture or because it was to an authority figure. I hope not the latter, because that objection would really be disgusting. The thought that came to mind was of the book SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT, in which **Dr. Frederick Wertham** wrote that he was appalled by a comic-book story in the '50s that portrayed the U.S. government as experimenting with biological warfare on the natives of a foreign country. As we now know, the truth was even more horrifying: they were indeed conducting such tests, but they were conducting them on *us*. That's the thing: there's nothing wrong with thumbing your nose at authority. **Jim Shooter** said later that neither he nor anyone else who looked at the book before it went to press realized that it was an obscene gesture.

JAMES: *So how obscene could it be?*

R.A.: Exactly. To me, it's so bland that after I read the book, and he then mentioned this obscene gesture, I couldn't call to mind what he was talking about. I think, though, it explains the state of Marvel Comics now, and the mentality behind the Marvel Comics. It's been conveyed to me by various people who work for Marvel that at this point it is virtually impossible for Marvel Comics to publish anything that will lose money. With that kind of power, knowing you've got that built-in base of support, it should be Marvel Comics that is moving in new directions, trying new things. Marvel Comics should be giving us books like MR. X and DALGODA and STIG'S INFERNO. Instead, we get X-FACTOR. Retreads, over and over again. TRANSFORMERS. We get toys and mutants from Marvel Comics.

JAMES: *Do you see any attempt at what you're talking about with the New Universe, or the Epic line?*

R.A.: I have no right to make assumptions, or judgements, about Marvel's motives for publishing anything, but I personally can't see the New Universe as an attempt to do *anything*, other than present a line of books that they can say unequivocally, **Jack Kirby** had nothing to do with. *(Laughter.)* I don't see any great originality or diversification there.

JAMES: *It is just a matter of there being no real competition in terms of sales?*

R.A.: I think so. Look — a kid comes into a store, he's got a buck and a half, he can buy two Marvel comics, but he can't buy a single issue of DALGODA with that. So he's going to go ahead and buy the Marvels, whether they're better or not. Now, I may be assuming something that's not true. If DALGODA and SPITFIRE AND THE TROUBLESHOOTERS were the same price, SPITFIRE might still outsell it several times over, simply because of the Marvel name. I'd hate to think so.

JAMES: *How much are Malibu Comics?*

R.A.: DARK WOLF and the other titles that are being published by Malibu will retail for $1.95. Realistically, I understand the economic necessity for such a price; but that part of me that's still a 12-year-old kid wants to scream that this is obscenely high. If there was anything I could do to bring the price down, I would. The price of comics today concerns me. With Eclipse comics down around the same price level as Marvel and DC, maybe we'll be seeing more head-to-head competition soon. I actually hope it will begin to erode Marvel's market — and not because I harbor any negative feeling toward Marvel, because despite what I've said, I really don't. It was Marvel that created this love I have for comics. But if other people start to make inroads, maybe it would scare them a little, shake them out of their complacency. In the early '60s, DC had no competi-

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had nothing to do with New Universe."

tion to speak of, they were firmly Number One. As a result, they became so set in their ways that they failed to react to Marvel in time to keep themselves from being bumped off as Number One, and I see Marvel in that same awful pattern now. If you have no one pushing you, you tend to stand still, and that's exactly what Marvel's done. They've begun to stagnate creatively. No one can argue that financially they're in better shape than they've ever been — and I realize you *can't* argue with that, it is a business. But it's not a business like making washing machines. I'm rather disturbed when the comics pros talk of it in terms of "product." They either forget, or don't care, that it's a *creative* product. There is some effort being made with Epic, but because it's direct sales, it's less accessible MOONSHADOW, by **J.M. DeMatteis** and **Jay Muth**, is one of the finest comics currently being published, and those creators are not afraid to take some chances. I remember being very indignant and disturbed when I read that dealers were returning copies of the first issue because it hadn't been made clear to them that it was for mature audiences.

JAMES: *Let's follow that up. There's an argument going the rounds right now that a reader's maturity has nothing to do with his or her age, that it should be up to the individual to decide if they're "adult" enough to buy certain material. But shouldn't* some *sort of morality come into play when you're creating material that's predominantly going to be read by children and adolescents who may not be capable of making such a distinction?*

R.A.: I think that's symptomatic of the incredible lack of responsibility that seems to be pervading America today. To my mind, the primary force behind any child should be that child's parents or guardian. If you take on the responsibility of parenthood, then you should have the guts and the integrity to assume all that that responsibility implies. Parents should be responsible for forming children's moral attitudes by showing them through example what's right and wrong. It's not television's place to worry about what the child's exposed to; it's not comics' place to worry about what that child reads. It's the *parents'* responsibility to have enough interest in their children and to have those lines of communication open enough that they're more or less aware of what their children are reading. If the parents object to a certain comic, I have no problem with that at all. In fact, it is the most effective form of censorship, and the only kind I consider to be legitimate

JAMES: *Do you think it's realistic, though, to expect parents to go into comics shops with their kids once a week when the shipment comes in, then sit down with a stack of comic books and leaf through them to see it there's anything objectionable in them?*

R.A.: I suppose that if you want to tack labels onto things that'll help the parents know, at the point of purchase, that this is intended for older audiences, that's...acceptable, maybe...it's not

WE QUIT!
YOU CAN'T DO THAT--!
I JUST DID! IF THIS IS THE WAY YOU TREAT PEOPLE WHO'VE SAVED THIS WORLD MORE TIMES THAN YOU CAN COUNT, WE'D RATHER BE PRIVATE CITIZENS!

"The Scarlet Witch had made what was referred to as an 'obscene gesture'."

WHAT--?
HOPE YOU LIKE THEM!
OH, AND ONE LAST THING, AGENT CYRIC! I LIKE CHANGING MY COSTUME NOW AND THEN, AND RECENTLY I'VE GONE BACK TO WEARING EVENING GLOVES--!

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"You've got to think for yourself."

"We make violence acceptable and sex unacceptable." Scimidar, by R.A. Jones.

fine. As most people know, that kind of label more often serves to *attract* children instead of warning anyone away from anything. But, no, I don't think it's necessary for the parents to do that, if they're open with their children in every *other* way. It's funny, too, that it always goes one way: there are people who want to believe that if you watch a certain type of movie or TV show, or read a certain type of book, you're going to go out and do awful things. But you seldom hear about the opposite. The same people make no claim that reading a good book is going to make you a good person. Reading, *any* kind of reading, is going to expose you to some sort of idea, and even if most of us find it a totally stupid idea, it's still going to help a child think for himself. That's the important thing: you've got to think for yourself. And there's nothing wrong with a child developing attitudes and perceptions different from his parents'. Everything a parent says isn't etched in stone, certainly. But if a child's mother and father through example show him that honest is best, integrity is best, treating people with an even hand is best, then that child's not going to pick up a comic book and read about a character like The Punisher and think, "Oh — what I've seen and been exposed to all my life is wrong. This comic is right. It's okay to go out and blow people away." I think that's ridiculous. Critics of the media love to cite examples of people imitating something they've read in a comic, or seen in a movie or whatever.

JAMES: *The classic "kid-puts-a-towel-on-his-back-jumps-off-a-roof . . ."*

R.A.: Exactly. And there's no doubt that this sort of thing does happen, but it's so rare. There are people who perform acts of violence that are horrendous, but that is going to happen regardless of what they're exposed to. The *method* of their violence may be imitative, but the violence itself is not sparked by what they read. Which reminds me of something that disturbs me even more about the censorship thing: it's *what* they want to censor. Generally speaking, it is sex. We make violence acceptable, and sex, one of the most natural acts of humanity, unacceptable. We discussed a good example of this in San Diego last summer, during a panel on violence. One of the participants was **Mike Grell**, who was telling us about a scene in JON SABLE in which Sable and Myke Blackmon go to bed together. It was something **Grell** had built up to gradually and in a very natural way, as a outgrowth of the development of the relationship between these two characters. Without **Grell**'s knowledge or permission, however, someone at First Comics decided it was necessary to cover the woman up a bit, and the comic came out with her wearing a negligee that **Grell** had not drawn. This is doubly bizarre when you consider that **Grell** says First has never exercised any editorial changes to tone down any of the acts of violence portrayed in that book — which, by the very nature of its subject matter, is one of the more graphically violent books on the market. It's shown blood spraying, knives penetrating bodies, people being blown up, and apparently that wasn't a problem for them; but this bit of nudity was.

JAMES: *You once said that perhaps it was a good thing that you weren't the one making editorial decisions, because you wouldn't want to draw* any *lines between what's acceptable and what's not. But when you were with Elite Comics, you were the one making those decisions.*

R.A.: That's right. I can only speak from a small amount of experience because, as you now know, I only held my position at Elite for eight months. An instance when such a decision was reached came in an early issue of SEADRAGON. **Dennis Yee** had a minor character make a reference to a woman's breasts using some bit of slang — "bazongas," or some such thing. **Carl Knappe**, the publisher, asked me if we should do something about that, so I took a look at it to see if there was anything inappropriate in the context in which it was used, and I *did* change it — but only to a different slang term, to make it clearer what he was talking about. My response to Carl was that I believe we should use *whatever* language, whatever visuals we felt necessary to tell our stories, and if we offend someone — tough. Naturally, you don't want to offend so many people that you go out of business, but my feeling is that if someone is offended by anything in an Elite book, they should stop buying it. I don't read or view things that I find

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"Most writers need a good editor."

offensive — but I don't think anyone has the right to arbitrate what other people should read or see. Anyway, that was the position I took, and Carl let me go with it. It was a minor thing, but in a small way I was able to put my money . . . or Elite's money, actually (*Laughter.*) . . . where my mouth is.

JAMES: *So you were in a position to actually change the words your writers used. As a writer yourself, how'd you feel about that?*

R.A.: *(Pause)* I didn't try to change the intent of what the author was trying to say. If I think there's a way the same thing can be said better, or more effectively, then certainly, I'd change it. It's difficult, because I realize that I'm simply imposing my opinion on a book — but, for good or bad, that's what an editor does. Even before I'd become one myself, I'd reached the conclusion that most writers *need* a good editor. The question I need to ask myself, though, is not "What can I change just because I've got the power to"; it's "Is this as good as it can be, or are there things that can be done to make it better?" If you're successful, it's good for everyone. If you're not successful, you've run the risk of having damaged that writer's reputation. That's one of the reasons not everyone would want to be an editor. *I* have problems with it. I don't really like telling people what to do, especially creative people like artists and writers.

JAMES: *Do you believe the "common wisdom" one sometimes reads that the illustration end of comics is better than ever, but the writing has failed to keep up with the art?*

R.A.: I really wouldn't say that. By and large, I think the writing *skills*, at least, that are evident in comics are superior to what they were thirty years ago. I think a lot of the deficiencies in writing come from above. There are editorial restrictions — and I'm not talking now about fixing some confusion in how a bit of dialogue's worded, I'm talking about *formulas* that are imposed on writers: this is what sells, so this is what you're going to do. The writer is often straitjacketed. I've heard writers complain that editors occasionally speak out of both sides of their mouths. They'll complain, "Can't you give us a story that doesn't have a slugfest in it?" And when you present them with one, they'll ask you where the fight scene is. Some editors feel that they have to go for the lowest common denominator. It's easier to convey, and understand, a punch to the face than it is to have two characters sit and discuss their differences. And obviously, you're not looking for that every issue. But we don't have to have a slugfest issue after issue, either.

JAMES: *You were "editor for a day" at Elite. If you ever again found yourself editing, say, black-and-white comics, what kind of series proposals would you accept?*

R.A.: I'm going to try to avoid having any preconceived notions of what will make a good b&w comic. Will it make a good *comic*, period? The only restrictions I intend to have are those which are imposed by the realities of the business. And since it's not *my* business, not my money that goes into the publishing of the books, I have an obligation to look for properties that will be money-making properties. I know that can lead to other restrictions. I haven't been in long enough for this to arise yet, but I know that there'll be an occasion when you look at something and say, "This is terrific — but it won't sell." But unless I own my own publishing company, there's nothing I can do about that. That's one thing you have to give **Gary Groth** credit for: he does put his money where his mouth is. He publishes books that he probably knows will not be major financial successes, but he makes a commitment to them if he thinks they're good. **Deni Loubert**, of Renegade Press, is another example. I'm sure she and Gary both devoutly wish that everything they do would be big money-makers, but they continue to publish books that in their

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ON SALE SOON

THE COMICS JOURNAL

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HUH?? WHATTA'YA MEAN— PANDERING?!! WE'RE TALKIN' HIGH ART HERE! I EVEN HIRED A SPECIAL MODEL FROM THE "IVAR THEATRE"!!
Dave Stevens 1987
* LOCAL "BUMP AND GRIND" ESTABLISHMENT

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"Superman is as much our mythos as Beowulf."

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judgement *deserve* to be published, whether they're smash hits or not. And if I find something that I like, I will push to have it published, even if I don't think it'll be a big money-maker, as long as there's a chance that it will at least make *some* profit. Other than that, I don't have any set criteria. I'm not just looking for super-hero series, either; if I find something I like in a Western, or a detective series, or whatever, I hope to be able to go with it. Some fine-tuning might be required to make it more . . . palatable . . . to a wider audience, and that's legitimate, I think, to occasionally "fool" people into trying something a little different. CROSSFIRE is probably the best example of that: "Let's take this bailbondsman and put a mask on him." and by the time readers realize he's not a super-hero, you've already hooked them on th eseries. Or JON SABLE: I can't remember the last time **Grell** bothered to put him in his battle mask, but nobody really misses it.

JAMES: *But that is, as you say, what the majority of the audience is looking for?*

R.A.: Sure, because that's one of the few genres, generally speaking, that can still be done better in comics than on TV or in the movies.

JAMES: *Which conveniently leads us to our wrap-up question . . . Your reviews have made it clear that you can still enjoy the standard super-hero book. What's the appeal to R.A. Jones in particular, and what do you think has kept the super-hero comic book at the top of the heap for so many years?*

R.A.: It may go back to that "adolescent power fantasy" phrase you hear. To a greater or lesser degree, perhaps we've never completely escaped that. This is certainly not an original idea with me, but I'm one of those who tend to see the comic book hero, especially the super-heroes, because they are so much larger than life, as our modern mythology. I think we lose perspective — for instance, the stories of Gilgamesh, the Greek and Roman mythology, the Norse myths, BEOWULF — no one sat down several millennia ago and said, "I'm going to create a work of art here." Most of those were done for mass consumption, for entertainment, to bring pleasure to the everyday folk, and occasionally to slip a moral lesson in. There seems to be a need for mythical heroes, something in the human psyche, that's inherent within most of us. The same could be said for the people standing in line recently to see RAMBO or COBRA. Rambo's a super-hero; he doesn't wear a costume or a cape, he has no mask, but he is a character taken far beyond a normal person. And when we see or read something that, I think we're projecting images of what we would like. We'd like to be in control. To use the Rambo analogy again, there are a great many people in America who wish we could strap on a gunbelt and hop on "over there" and kick some ass, and show people that we can stand tall. We would all like to be better than we are, more than we are. Ideally, we should go about trying to do that in our own lives — not to superheroic extents, obviously, but by becoming the best person we can. If we can't, or if we don't, it's easier to fantasize, and think, "If only . . ." That's what super-heroes are, they're mythic heroes. Superman, I think, is as much a part of our mythos as Hercules, Beowulf, or Gilgamesh, and deservedly so. It won't go down as great literature, as some others have. But those comics have let us all escape for a few minutes, and everyone needs to do that. The world is too much with us . . . *(Laughter.)* and from time to time, I think it does us all good, children and adults alike, to slip into a figurative pair of tights and just take off. We'd like to believe that, maybe somehow, a man really can fly.

"I think it does us all good . . . to slip into a figurative pair of tights and just take off," Jones says. Above: Superman, Jones' idea of American mythology.

X-THIEVES™ #5

by **Henry Vogel** & **Mark Propst**

COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"DC asked us to make WATCHMEN buttons."

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HANK ROSE

I first met Hank Rose at the San Diego Trade Show and, within minutes, we were busy insulting each other. In jest, of course. (I think.) For a guy who spends most of his time dreaming up marketing schemes, he seems unusual. Kind of dreamy-eyed and laid-back, almost like a Californian rather than a (gasp) Jerseyite.

Hank didn't start out as a rich capitalist, though — he's had to work his way up the ladder in the dog-eat-dog world of comics merchandising. You know: buttons, mugs, posters, underwear and all those other silly products that somebody makes a bundle on.

*In fact, when I interviewed Hank at the Chicago Star*Reach Trade Show, somebody was making an illegal bundle by pirating the official version of Hank's WATCHMEN button . . .*

MARK BORAX: *Let's talk about this pirated button. What's the scoop?*

HANK ROSE: DC came to us and asked us to make WATCHMEN buttons for them, which we did, and apparently somebody else thought it would be a good idea — because there seem to be *two* bloody smiley face buttons.

MARK: *Identical colors?*

HANK: Similar colors. The interesting thing is that the blood drips off of one eye on our button and off the other eye on the other button. *(Laughter.)* So it's easy to find who's right and who's wrong.

MARK: *And you haven't caught the culprits yet?*

HANK: No. We don't look for the culprits. We just don't worry about it. DC, that's what they do. Discover the Culprit, that's what DC stands for. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *How long have you been stamping for DC?*

HANK: Well, we've done some promotions for DC but, of course, Comic Images has the license rights from Marvel Comics — who I *think* might be a DC competitor to some extent — to manufacture all kinds of novelty items for the industry.

MARK: *So mostly you've got the Marvel license?*

HANK: Yeah, and then other companies will come to us and ask us to do products for promotions or for distributors. We had the First Comics buttons for awhile and we did fine with them, but we find that we're more at home with Marvel because they can generate bigger numbers.

MARK: *So, you make buttons. What else do you do?*

HANK: We make T-shirts. We make framed photos — which are little posters, about 12 by 15 inches, in a pressboard frame. We make something called shadowbox heroes, which are 3 by 5 plastic frames into which goes your favorite Marvel characters. We also make various and sundry novelty items: mugs and hats. We've toyed with making jackets, but they're a high ticket item, and we're finding our greatest successes right now are in manufacturing *lower* priced items. *(Laughter.)* We have put out a sticker collection, the official Marvel Universe sticker collection, and an album that these 77 stickers get stuck into, and we sold out on our first printing and by the time we got finished with our second printing we were sold out of them, so we'll probably go back for a third printing. We're working on putting together the second series of stickers, which will be the history of the X-Men. The album will be a narrative — both graphically and through words — describing what the X-Men have gone through during the number of years they have been in publication, and the stickers will be pie-like poses of action things that took place with the different characters, the changes in the characters over the course of time. It's pretty exciting.

MARK: *How are these distributed?*

HANK: We go through the same channels that the books go through, which would be basic independent distributors of comic books and peripherals — and, let's face it, we're peripheral.

"We did the preliminary design work

MARK: *Solely to comic-book shops?*

HANK: Yes. Our license from Marvel gives us the rights to go only into comic-book stores. Now that's not bad. Sure, you can generate big numbers of outlets if you go into the mass market, but then again you have to say to yourself, "Well, the Marvel characters that appeal to people who read comic books are probably unknown to people who *don't* read the comic books." You know, a little kid might like Spider-Man, the Hulk, Captain America — which, except for Spider-Man, are what you would say are weaker characters in the Marvel Universe. You obviously know that Wolverine and the Punisher and Elektra and Daredevil are the hotter characters — but if we put those characters out in the mass market, they would sit on K-Mart shelves forever.

MARK: *So you don't look at it as a hindrance that your license only allows you to distribute to comics shops?*

HANK: Only in the fact that we don't generate the numbers, but we do look at it as a strong point, in that we are probably the largest distributor of other-than-comic-books into comic-book shops, and we *love* the comic-book industry. The people are fans, they know what they like, and we try to give them what they like, and it's easier to identify trends. We sort of follow what's happening with the sales of the books. As go sales of the books, then we know that we'll sell that many more of whatever product that we put a hot character on. Punisher recently has been very, very strong — therefore, practically every one of our products carrying Punisher's image is selling well. So it's not a hindrance, it's really a help.

MARK: *How'd you get into this, from the comic-book angle or from the merchandising angle?*

HANK: Actaully, we were invited to take the license by Marvel Comics. We were the guys that did the preliminary design work and sort of put the Underoos program out on the market. We didn't distribute it and we didn't make all the money. Fruit of the Loom — they were the guys that distributed the thing — and we worked for them

MARK: *But you designed it?*

HANK: We designed it and we printed the transfers, or the images, that would go onto the garments, onto the little underwear sets, and did that for, oh, about six years, in one of our plants down in North Carolina; and because of our working with Marvel for Union Underwear we got familiar with the people there and they knew that we could do a good job, and

"Punisher recently has been very, very strong..." Punish your paper —?!

when. I guess it was realized by Marvel, by the people at Marvel, basically **Carol Kalish,** who said, "Well, look, the direct market has been ignored, and the direct market is *starved* of products." I mean, everybody else, you go into your local stores in the mass market and you can see any license having any numbers of different types of merchandise for sale.

MARK: *Like in a bookstore.*

HANK: In a bookstore or whatever, but where are the comic-book fans... where's the merchandise for comic-book fans? They were being ignored.

MARK: *So Carol lit a light bulb up in your head?*

HANK: Well, she did to the licensing department who then called us in and said, "Hey, guys, you did a terrific job for Union Underwear with Underoos, could you do a terrific job for us?" And we said, "We don't know." We didn't know anything about comic books. The last comic book I read was LITTLE LULU or something like that. Am I showing my age?

MARK: *When was this that they called you?*

HANK: I guess it was in the fall of '83, and we drove around to any number of comic-book stores for about a two-week period asking them if they thought that we could fill a need, and they were *delighted.* They were *excited* about it.

MARK: *So you went straight to the horse's mouth.*

HANK: Yeah, we had to, and we asked them what products would they buy, what would they be most likely to —

MARK: *How many places did you go to?*

HANK: We went to about 25 to 30.

MARK: *Where?*

HANK: Well, our factory is in northern New Jersey — in Saddle Brook, New Jersey, about 15 minutes from New York City — so we went to stores in New York City, New Jersey, down as far as Washington, as far north as Boston.

MARK: *Did you bring any prototypes of just simply ask questions?*

HANK: Questions. We didn't have any prototypes to bring. So what we did was we got good answers from them and decided to give it a shot.

MARK: *No negative responses?*

HANK: Not that I can remember. If there were any it was just people's little peccadillos.

MARK: *"We'd like buttons but we don't want posters."*

HANK: No, it was more than that, it was, "Well, we want to be a bookstore, we don't want to carry other stuff," We knew when we went into it that there would be

and put underoos out on the market."

stores like that, but we also felt that perhaps those stores would change their minds when they saw their competitors carrying our merchandise, which was saleable and attractive and filled a need for the fan that was buying the stuff. So we launched our first line in April of 1984.

MARK: *Between the time that you did your door to door survey and you launched your line, what else happened? I imagine there had to be a certain amount of research and design in order to launch the products.*

HANK: Yes. What we did was we tried to become as familiar with comics as we could, and my partner, **George Fahz,** and I, as we said, really didn't —

MARK: *Just started reading 'em?*

HANK: I started. I got the job. We had a coin toss and I lost. *(Laughter.)* So I started —

MARK: *You got Carol to send you some freebies, I hope!*

HANK: Yeah, I'm on the subscription list now, get all the comics, which is a great part of . . . *now* it's one of my proud possessions. You should see my office. My walls are lined with Marvel comics.

MARK: *So you're hooked?*

HANK: Yeah. Now I faithfully read as many as I can, you know, and now I'm getting into the undergrounds and everything like that. It has been an awakening for me.

MARK: *Did you ever get your partner to read them?*

HANK: No, he reads GOLD DIGEST a lot, I think that's the extent of his reading habits, that and THE NEW YORK TIMES. Basically, that's it. Anyway, to answer your question, between the time that we decided to go into it and the time that we actually lanuched our first product line, it was an educational process. It was also trying to figure out how we were going to create all of these products, because our business previous to that was not in manufacturing finished products but to manufacture or provide a service for companies that did make a garment, let's say, like Underoos. All we did in that respect was that we designed the images, decorated the garments, or portions of the garments, and they did the rest.

MARK: *Did you, yourself, design?*

HANK: I designed. I'm not an artist but I can sort of art direct and determine now what will sell and what won't sell, do the looks and things like that.

MARK: *At that point, since you weren't an artist, how did you generate the art?*

HANK: Fortunately . . .

MARK: *Or did the comics companies generate the art?*

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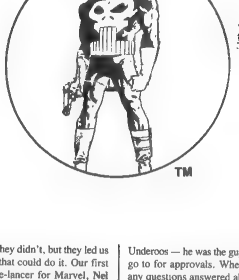
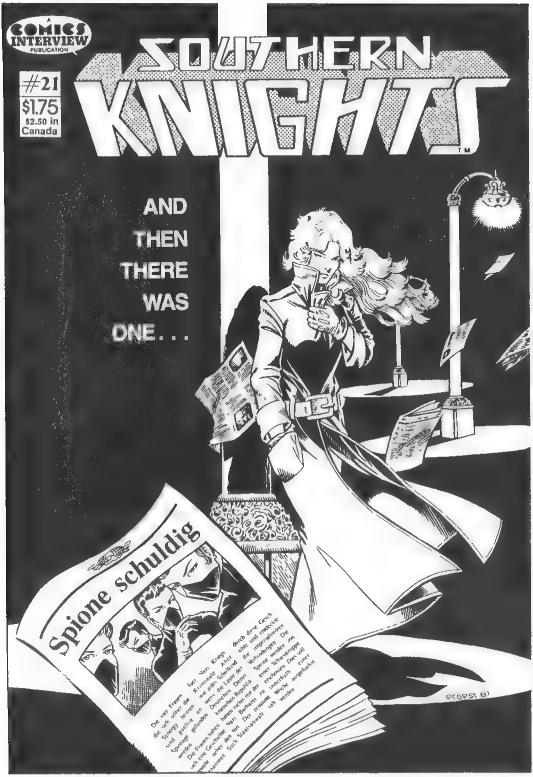


HANK: Well, they didn't, but they led us to their people that could do it. Our first artist was a free-lancer for Marvel, **Nel Yomtov.** He does basically coloring now, on a free-lance basis. He's a wonderful person and was also involved with us in Underoos — he was the guy that we would go to for approvals. Whenever I needed any questions answered about characters or products or this or that in the industry, I would call on him. He was sort of our guru when we first got started.



SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #21 **Behind the iron curtain, the Knights get into their new role as undercover superheroes! Don't miss this one!**

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"We put out a new product line every month."

MARK: *So he did a lot of the design work?*

HANK: He did *all* of the design work at first, and since that time we've had a few other artists for our line. **Joe Albelo,** who was one of the creators of PETER PORKER, THE AMAZING SPIDER-HAM, did it very successfully for several months, until he was called into action on PETER PORKER as a full-time job and left us. I was sorry to see him go. And then we had another artist, **Bruce Solatov,** who is now on staff at Marvel, one of **Romita's** Raiders, and he did it for about a year. And now our line, I'm very happy to say, is being beautifully handled by Telegraphics, which is the art studio portion of the **Joe Kubert** School out in Dover, New Jersey.

MARK: *You have a deal with Joe and he supplied your talent?*

HANK: Well, we have a deal with his studio, which is run by **Mark McNapth (2e's),** and what they do is they bring in alumni and will put together whatever I need. The nice thing about it is that I'm talking with real hard-core comic fans. They have, like, 140 full-time students, and all the faculty can speak our jargon and our language and if I say Silver Surfer they don't scratch their heads and say, "huh," so we're very, very pleased with that association now and I hope it's gonna be a real long one. It's really helped. I mean, we've used so many pieces of art over the course of our history — we put out a new product line every single month.

MARK: *Every month?*

HANK: Every single month, like clockwork.

MARK: *You change all your buttons, you change all your clothes —*

HANK: Everything. In any given month we will have eight new buttons, eight new panel pins —

MARK: *What happens to the old ones? Do they still sell and just accumulate until you have a million different ones, or do you weed out some of the earlier ones?*

HANK: Well, the way we work is that we produce the products first, graphically, on our flier. The flier precedes the actual production.

MARK: *That big blue flier?*

HANK: Our big blue or gold or green or whatever color it is. We try to change it every single month so that the customer knows it's a new one. And we will take orders for the products and then make the products. The nice thing about that is that our inventory is low. We get the orders based on what it looks like on the flier, and then we produce them after we get the orders for them.

This Art Adams drawing "was to be a wallhanging. We advertised it, but when Marvel realized it was from HEROES FOR HOPE, they stopped us from producing it. Nothing from HEROES could be used for profitable ventures."

MARK: *How long does that take?*

HANK: A month. We turn it over very quickly. I beat my partner with a whip all the time so he gets the products made, and it seems to work. In most instances, we can turn the product in four to, at worst, six weeks. Recently, we've had some problems — related to our recent success — with the Marvel Universe sticker line. We've just blown them out. We just can't print them fast enough.

MARK: *Are the retailers getting mad, because they're not able to order any more?*

HANK: It's not that they're getting mad, it's that they're being disappointed because . . . for the most part, the distributors order pretty close to what they get in actual orders, and they don't usually carry a lot of our stuff after the month that it has been solicited for. What has happened with the stickers is that — once they started to hit the stores, and then once the album came out to go with it — the customer was just buying up everything and we found ourselves out of stickers. The distributors called up and asked for them and we just didn't have them, so we

"X-MEN stickers caused us a problem."

had to go back to press. By the time we got off the presses the second time we were already out of some of the more popular stickers, so . . .

MARK: *So you lose a little momentum.*

HANK: You lose a little momentum, but I think it's understandable. COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE was nice enough to do a little article about our going back to press, that sort of held people off. But we're already coming out, as I said, with our second series line of the history of the X-Men, so the stickers have been great for us. It's also caused a little problem — but that's the kind of problem you like to have as a businessman.

MARK: *Being too successful?*

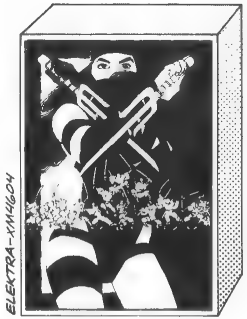
HANK: Yeah, I'd like to do that all of the time. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *What attracts you to this industry moreso than if you were doing the same job in a different industry? Do you see any things that make what you're doing now different?*

HANK: There are a lot similarities in that the apparel business — which I was basically in, when we were designing images and transfers for clothing — was topical. We worked a lot with licensed products, obviously; all of the superheroes and all of the major licensors: Hanna-Barbera, Archie, Cabbage Patch. We did an awful lot of stuff. They were seasonal. They were in a position where if they had a hot item they hadda get it out very quickly, so we were always under a lot pressure. We're used to working under pressure, and that's — I *think* — why we can churn out as many products as we do. We have almost 50 products on our flier every single month. We can churn them out in a month's time, so we're used to that. That's a good similarity. Some of the differences are that . . . I guess probably the greatest plus about being in the comic-book industry — as opposed to being in the garment or apparel or fashion industry — is I don't have to wear a suit and a tie anymore. I mean, this is *wonderful!* I'm in a plaid shirt and a pair of old dungarees and my moccasins, and I'm well dressed. Other than that, I can't think of anything. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Well, it might be more interesting for you to read the latest issue of X-MEN than to peer at the latest fashion designs. (Laughter.)*

HANK: That's true. Another thing is that I honestly believe that in the comic-book industry we're dealing with a much more intelligent — this may sound very self-serving, but it's the absolute truth — the people are much more interesting, literate, and you can have fun although it's a very



"I sometimes tip the tollbooth person."

serious business in dollars and cents. We all have fun in it, and I'm talking from the publishers to the distributors down to the customers.

MARK: *Even sometimes the writers and artists.*

HANK: I wouldn't go that far, Mark. *(Laughter.)* You know, it's a fun industry to be in. It's a young industry. Young not necessarily in years — though obviously that, too —

MARK: *There's a lot of room for growth.*

HANK: Yes, there's a lot of room for growth, but the minds of the people are young. They are *willing* to do things that might not be considered mainstream, and that's always good for me. I guess I'm sort of a, you know, I'm a throwback to the '60s rebellious era and I guess I enjoy doing things that might not be considered mainstream. God knows, if you've seen some of the bumper stickers that we've produced over the course of time —

MARK: *Such as?*

HANK: All of our mutant themes, you know. MOTHER MADE ME A MUTANT. MERRY MUTANT DAY. I mean, you can take liberties and you *know* that you can't take them in other industries. This industry has a sense of humor. To be happy, I have to function in an industry that has a sense of humor.

MARK: *Rather than board meetings and gray flannel suits.*

HANK: Exactly. Rather than "How many dozens of T-shirts am I gonna sell this season and if I don't I'm gonna jump out the window." That's sometimes what the apparel business is about. Not all the time, but it's much more frantic because you're dealing with unbelievable amounts of money, when you have a company that has to ship thousands upon thousands of dozens of garments to a major retail outlet.

MARK: *High tension.*

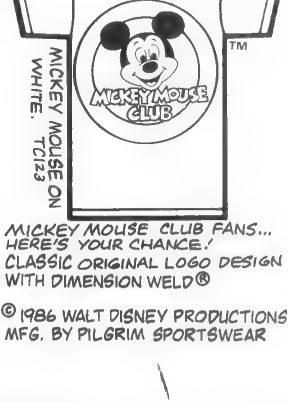
HANK: Yes, very, very high tension, very high stakes. You sometimes can lose your sense of humor. But this industry doesn't ever seem to lose its sense of humor. It doesn't lose its desire to change. It doesn't lose its compassion for the new. And it takes chances, and sometimes you fail, but that's how you learn. That's what's great about this industry.

MARK: *Do you ever dream of a billion dollar promotional campaign that someday your company could come up with?*

HANK: I did, but my accountant said it would screw up my tax bracket, so I threw it in the trash. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Which waste basket is that? (Laughter.)*

HANK: No, very honestly, with the scope of this industry — speaking very personally — we don't get rich doing it, but we'll make a living and we'll have a good time and it's fun coming to these shows and cons around the country and meeting the people that you know are carrying your merchandise and *selling* your merchandise for you. That's always nice. I mean, they are the front line. They are the people that are actually selling our merchandise.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MARK: *They're out in the trenches.*

HANK: Yeah, and if they can make money doing it, that's what we want to do, so we want to help them in any way we can.

MARK: *When you're not at trade shows and conventions, are you spending all of your time answering phone calls and making phone calls? What do you do?*

HANK: I try to figure out new products. The industry is one of change, and we have come out with products that have been less than successful. I have to do an awful lot of research in trying to find products that we can make, that our customers want, that the stores can sell and make a profit, something that they won't get *stuck* with, something with appeal to their 12-year-old customer as well as their 30-year-old customer, and that's hard. That's very hard to do, you know, sitting in our factory in northern New Jersey trying to figure out what's gonna work for somebody in, you know, Sheboygan.

MARK: *How do you do that? What kind of research goes in?*

HANK: That's some telephoning and it's talking to the distributors who really have the pulse in their specific areas, coming to the shows. Well, I guess an awful lot is basically — I guess after as many years as we've been doing this thing now — knowing what the comic fan wants, and wants enough to spend a couple of bucks to have. I guess I do more nowadays in my head, or in my psychic head, than I do on the telephone. I'm willing to gamble and put it out there for a couple of months and make it if I feel secure enough

"I have tattoos all over my body."

"If I say 'Silver Surfer' they don't scratch their heads and say 'huh?'"

in the fact that the people who put it in their stores are gonna have the customers that are willing to buy it. I guess *that's* how I spend most of my time, in the creation of the specific lines, the product makes every month, and looking for the new products.

Sometimes, it's a real problem. I'm convinced that tattoos can be a terrific, terrific product — and I'm market researching as we speak, I have tattoos all over my body . . . *(Laughter.)* I want to see how long they last. I just got a real kick in the gut this past week when our product liability insurance specialist told us we couldn't run the product because it touches skin. Now *here's* a real problem. I mean, I have what I *think* would be a *terrific* item —

MARK: *Can't you get a new policy? Some people have sold tattoos with bubblegum cards — there must be some way to do it.*

HANK: Yeah, well, what I have to do is to find an insurance agent that is not a Republican. *(Laughter.)* I'm not gonna give up yet. I can't give up, because I can't get the tattoos off. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Do you find you do some of your best work before falling asleep at night or when you wake up in the morning — do you keep a pad by your bed? Do you have certain times for creating these ideas?*

HANK: Interesting you should ask, because I guess most creative time is sitting in the New York or northern Jersey traffic jams. If I remember, I'll turn off my radio and things come to mind, and I have a lot of time to create without interruption. It also helps me to get through the traffic jams.

MARK: *Do you jot it down or —*

HANK: Yeah.

MARK: *—do you have a tape recorder—*

HANK: No, I have a pad that I keep right there. I've had several near misses when I've come up with a great idea. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *But they're worth it, because you'll be going over the bridge with dollar signs in your eyes?*

HANK: Absolutely. You know, I sometimes tip the toll booth person, because I've just come up with a great idea. They don't know how to handle that. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Well, we're wrapping up, do you have anything you could say in about 5 or 10 seconds that you didn't say yet?*

HANK: Well, I can ask for checks and money orders to just keep coming in. *(Laughter.)* I would just like to open up our end of the bargain and tell people that we are in Saddle Brook, New Jersey, and in the phone book, and if you have any comments or criticisms or input we invite *all* kinds of comments. That's how *we* learn. That's how we will continue to provide what we consider to be a *good* product line for the industry. If anybody wants to give us a call or jot down some information, negative or positive, we're more than willing and happy to look it over and discuss it with you.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

PHOTO Steve Bryant

FORTUNATE TO LATCH ONTO LATEST SOLD OUT ISSUE!

Dear DAK:

Well, it nearly happened to me again. After missing out on your special BATMAN **Frank Miller** ish of one year ago I was especially vigilante about watching for the **Frazetta** issue, #41. Arriving at the comics stores in Toronto within an hour or two following the distribution of the latest titles, I was hopeful of being able to snag a copy. No such luck, "all sold out," I was told. The following week I was fortunate enough to glom onto a late arriving copy. Now, I was one of a handful of fans who were fortunate enough to be there at the instant they were put on sale to the public. Why on earth don't you increase the print runs on what are bound to be heavily sought after collector's items? I realize I could subscribe, but buying in a store is preferable to me at this time. How 'bout it?

Frank Frazetta has always been a favourite of mine. I, too, bought those **Lancer** CONANS and Ace **Burroughs** as much for the covers as for the contents. To this day there is something deeply primal, powerfully dynamic about those paintings. It isn't something his flock of successful imitators like **Boris Vallejo** or **Ken Kelly** even come close to capturing. His paintings look like they might come to life at any moment when you're done looking at them, but remain strong visual memories. In the interview he comes across as extremely self confident, even conceited about the quality of his work — but that's okay, I think. It's actually refreshing to hear him say he honestly thinks his work belongs with the all time great artists, bar none. I don't picture myself getting into an argument with him over it. A good interview, even though it was done in 1985 and he spent a lot of time promoting his museum and failed foray into the movie business (FIRE AND ICE). Where are those DEATH DEALER paintings he was talking about?

T.M. Maple's comments to me with respect to the merits of using a foreign subscription service as opposed to a local source don't stand up to closer scrutiny. On a typical day recently I bought the following 14 comics at the Canadian prices listed: 3 at 95¢ each, 4 at $1, 2 at $1.35, 1 at $1.75, 3 at $2.10 and 1 at $2.25. That totals $19.85 minus 20¢ off per comic, $2.80 equals $17.05. Add 7% tax of $1.19 for a grand total of $18.24. On the other hand, American prices would have amounted to $17.75. Say you then got a 30% discount, that's $5.31 off, making it $12.44 plus a 40% exchange rate, now making it $17.40. Let us also say, conservatively, that you are asked to pay the equivalent of 10¢ a comic for postage and handling — $1.40 in this instance. In U.S. funds that now totals $1.96 making a grand total of . . .ta da — $19.35 Canadian as opposed to the shop's total of $18.24. A one week's savings of $1.12.

Now, if you are living in an isolated community in Canada where no comics shops are available it is probably worth the trouble. If you are like me, however, and a) have ready access to several well

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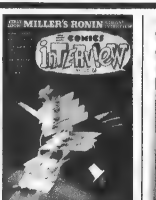

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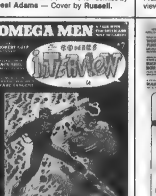

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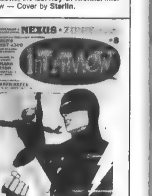

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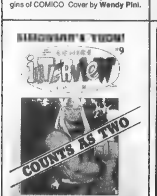

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comics **65** *interview*

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stocked comics emporiums, b) need to have your comics as they arrive, not one or two weeks later in the mail and c) pick the copies you want and not depend on the Post Orifice to damage or misdeliver your books; why would anyone want to bother with a sub service?

Gary Kimber
2100 Bathurst Street, Apt. 101
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By complaining about how easy it is to miss an instantly sold out issue of COMICS INTERVIEW, you answer your own question. For one thing, you're guaranteed of getting copies of magazines and comics you want!

Actually, Gary, there's nothing I'd like to do more than make sure COMICS INTERVIEW was widely available to all readers — but the "direct sales" distribution system doesn't work that way. And you're far from the only one who runs the risk of missing an issue; Frank Miller recently told managing editor Mark Borax that he, too, misses issues that sell out in the Los Angeles area. But it isn't my fault — really (don't you think that, as publisher, I'd love to sell more copies?!).

We offer issues for sale three months in advance of publication, at which time retailers have the opportunity to order as many copies as they want. We print quantities based on orders received from them through distributors — and give a hefty discount to compensate them for taking part of the risk. Except, the way it's been working lately, they don't want to take any risk.

For instance, it doesn't exactly take a genius to figure out that a Frank Frazetta issue is going to be in demand — and to order accordingly. The same goes for a great many recent issues, from G.I. Joe (#37) to DARK KNIGHT (#31), all of which sold out instantly. We can't take the risk for retailers and print excess copies while still giving them a far greater discount than we give Waldenbooks, which gets a much smaller discount because we — not they — are accepting the risk of printing excess copies.

Next time your retailer sells out of COMICS INTERVIEW — or any of our other titles ,let him know he didn't order enough copies and, if he or she doesn't shape up, you'll take your business to a retailer who orders enough copies to satisfy customers.

— DAK

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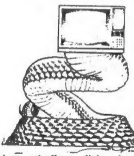

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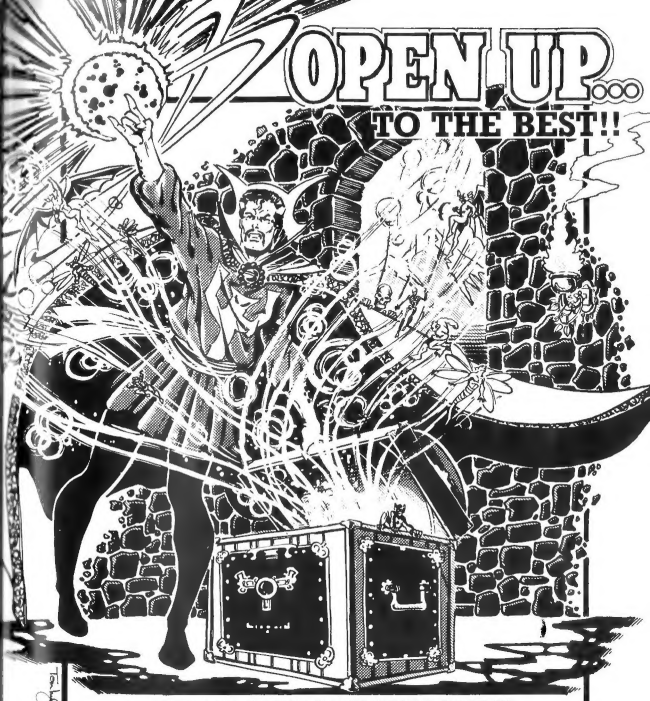

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